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SCIENCE FICTION

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BRITISH EDITION No. 8  
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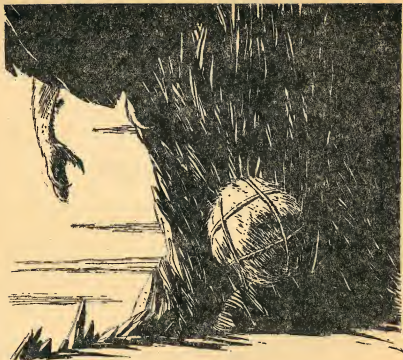
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THE colonist-ferry *Gegenschein* sounded its final warning honk and Mart Devers got off into the safe zone along with the other colonists and watched the ship go.

It was almost like dying, like finishing a life hardly begun. After the ship had vanished in the cloud-muddied sky, Mart Devers realized for the first time how dreamlike and unimportant his past was becoming, how immediate and uncertain his future loomed.

He stood by himself, nervously, looking at the seared place where the *Gegenschein* had been. The colonists had been deposited in a sandy clearing at the shore of a glittering lake; not far away there was a dark, ominous-looking forest, and high beyond rose arching cliffs. The forest either was or was not inhabited by humanoid alien beings, depending on whether you believed Dave Matthews' interpretation of what he claimed to have seen lurking there five minutes after the landing—or the survey team's tentative report that this continent of Siros had no intelligent life.

Chill winds swept down on Devers and the others as they waited for the Colony Director to organize things, to take charge.

Robert Silverberg

# ***THE WINDS OF SIROS***

*A cave on unknown Siros with the wind moaning by. . .  
A skinny, scared kid, a tough adventurer, and two  
women held prisoner by hostile aliens.  
And hate building up—hate more dangerous than the  
aliens . . .*

They were a motley, ill-assorted bunch, as any batch of forced colonists had a right to be. The hundred of them had been grabbed up by the lottery, thrown together roughly by the untender mercies of a giant analog computer, and packed off like cattle on a tenth-class ship to colonize Siros.

Devers wasn't happy about it. A doctor in embryo only—a shivering skinny twenty-year-old college pre-med who would never have to worry about medical-school applications now. A flip of the wheel, a random twitch . . .

. . . and they threw you onto a planet like Siros. They ripped you out of your old life and told you to build a new one, on a cold wind-swept planet where shadowy alien shapes skulked through the dark forest.

A hand grabbed Devers' shoulder firmly. He turned.

"You look lousy," Ky Morgan said to him.

"I feel lousy. Mind?"

Morgan shrugged. "Your privilege, kid. But you better stop brooding about Earth. Earth doesn't exist any more as far as you and me are concerned. There's just Siros."

"I know. But it takes a while to get used to it," Devers said.

"We been here three hours, and we'll be here a little longer. . . . Well, I'll see you. Time for wife-picking's coming up—think I'll go look over the merchandise."

Morgan strode springily away toward a nearby clump of women. Devers' eyes followed him, and he wondered again what made the big man tick.

Morgan was a Volunteer.

He was something special, a broad, big man who had put his name on the line for voluntary selection, and who hadn't cared what world he was sent to. Aboard the *Gegenschein*, men got out of his way when he came by. His skin was tanned till it looked like expensive morocco or cordovan, and his voice was a heavy growling rumble. He wore his Volunteer's status like a badge of merit—which it was.

Devers wasn't any Volunteer. He looked round the group at the others. Neither was Lora Hallinan, the wide-eyed, innocent-looking girl down there, and neither was Sherry Leon, who didn't look so innocent. And neither were any of the other ninety-six, for that matter.

Down in the clearing, Phil Haas, the Colony Director, was standing on a packing-crate, blowing his whistle. Time to get things set up. Devers joined the gathering group.

"We're on our own now," Haas said, speaking loudly to fight the whistling wind. "That ship isn't coming back. And we've got plenty to do. Let's set up the stockade and inflate the domes."

A voice from the back—Dave Matthews' voice—said, "Phil, what about those aliens I saw? You think we ought to have a permanent patrol?"

Haas frowned. "I'm still not so sure those were aliens you saw, Dave. The survey team didn't find any such things here—"

"So they didn't look!"

"Dave, if you want to discuss this further, take it up with me in private. We can't spare men for a patrol until the stockade's been built. Besides which, your aliens are probably more afraid of us than we are of them." Haas chuckled. "Let's get busy. Plenty of things to do by nightfall—including the marrying. Today's June 30, 2342. If we get set up by midnight, we can all still have June weddings."

Mart Devers hadn't figured on getting married quite so soon. He had been supposed to graduate from Ohio State the following year, and he had planned on medical school, interning, a good practice and then—not before—a wife.

He drew his jacket tighter around himself. Like most thin people he had little use for cold weather and that damned nor'wester that seemed to rip down on them constantly.

Haas was talking to Morgan and three or four of the strongest men of the group working out the set-up plans. There was a fixed procedure for setting up a new colony—a procedure that had worked well on the hundreds of worlds to which humanity spread. First you established a stockade, marking the original boundaries of the colony. Then you inflated the bubble-houses that would be the homes of the colony. And then you expanded. You built outward into the alien wilds, you went forth and multiplied. And, one by one, new Earths were brought into being across space by grumbling, miserable pioneers.

Devers stole a look at the little group of women. Most of them, through

a fluke in the lottery, were older than he—twenty-five, twenty-six at least. Lora Hallinan, at twenty-two, was closest to his age.

She was slim, full-breasted, with brown hair, black eyes. Pretty. Too pretty, Devers thought ruefully. When the time came for the picking, she'd be taken early.

He wondered about the other girls. Sherry Leon, for instance—tall, brassy, a little overblown. About thirty, and she looked as if she'd been through a lot. The impartial scoop of the lottery seized all kinds.

Well, one of them was going to be his wife on this bitter world. Turning, Devers peered at the wind-tossed forest, feeling a strange uneasiness.

It took seven hours of backbreaking work to get the preliminary layout of the colony off the improvised charts and into actuality. Devers joined one of the work gangs; while the men erected a stockade, the women unpacked the sealed packages of provisions and tools and other vital belongings.

It was nearly nightfall, and giant Vega had dipped far below the horizon, when the job was done. Phil Haas blew a quick blast on his whistle.

"Okay. We're all set up." He looked at the fifty small bubbles that would house fifty couples that night, at the fifty-first bubble, the big one that would be the central gathering-place of the colony.

"Good job," Haas said. "Let's finish it off, now. Wives."

"Yeah. Wives," grunted Ky Morgan. He dropped his axe and strolled to the center of the clearing.

Devers tensed. His stomach felt strange, and his hands were cold. *Wives*. In a few hours, he was going to have a woman for the first time. . . .

Haas organized the women into a group. Sherry Leon was smiling, openly expectant. But some of the others—those who had dreamed of a different sort of wedding-night—they were apprehensive, worried, pale.

Haas unfolded a sheet of paper. He looked a little apprehensive himself. "The time has come to couple off," he said, "as arranged by the terms of the colonial charter. You know the system. As a Volunteer, Ky Morgan has the right to choose first. I get second pick, as Colony Director. After that, we proceed in order of Wheel Number—an order known only to me. . . .

"Morgan, name your choice."

Morgan stepped forward, smiling calmly. He was the biggest, most aggressive male in the group, and he knew it. He ran his eyes carelessly down the row of females; a strange mixture of emotions appeared on fifty feminine faces.

After a moment of silence, he grinned and said, "Okay. I pick Sherry Leon."

Devers realized he had been holding his breath, praying for Morgan to bypass Lora Hallinan.

Haas said, "Miss Leon, is this choice agreeable?"

Sherry Leon stared levelly at Morgan. There were wrinkles creasing the skin around her eyes, and her smile looked artificial. "I guess so," she said. "If he wants me, I'll go."

Devers heard people snickering. A little testily Haas said, "This is marriage Miss Leon. It's not just for tonight."

"None of your damned piousness!" Sherry snapped. Then, shaking her head, she said, "I guess I earned that. Okay. I'll take Morgan."

Devers watched the couple walk off to take their pick of house-site. *No ceremony?* he wondered. *But—*

*But it's a new world, he told himself. A brand new world.*

Haas was next, and to no one's surprise picked Mary Elliot, who accepted. At thirty-eight she was the oldest woman in the group; she and Haas had kept constant company on ship.

Haas then referred to the list and announced that Lee Donaldson had next pick. Donaldson named Claire Lubetkin; she wavered indecisively, finally accepted him. After Donaldson came Howard Stoker. He picked Rina Morris.

But Rina Morris shook her head. "Sorry. I'll wait."

Stoker shrugged. "Guess I get another pick, then. Well, Lora Hallinan."

Devers whitened. Haas said, "Sorry, Howard. Regulations don't give you a second chance until everyone else has spoken."

Stoker scowled bitterly, spat, returned to line. "Mart Devers," Haas called out.

Stunned at the reprieve, Devers reddened, stepped forward awkwardly. "L-Lora Hallinan," he said.

"Miss Hallinan?"

Devers waited. It was years before she finally said, "Accepted."

He and Lora picked the bubble-house that adjoined Morgan's. The domes were empty, merely arching shelters against the downslanting winds, but they did provide a place to sleep if you didn't mind the ground. Colonists weren't supposed to mind the ground, until there was time to build beds.

"I hadn't expected it to be like this," she said suddenly. "Not at all."

"Neither had I. What did you do on Earth?"

"Do? Oh—I was a stenographer. Typist, mostly. I was living at home, waiting around to get married. Well, now I *am* married—sort of."

Devers was disappointed. He had hoped she was an actress, a writer, maybe a singer. Well, a stenographer would have to do. "I was going to college," he said. "Pre-med, Ohio State. I guess *that's* all finished." He laughed—a nervous, brittle laugh. Overhead, Vega's last rays were fading from the sky.

They tried to make conversation for perhaps ten minutes. It wasn't much good.

"It's like a blind date," Lora said. "A blind date that's for keeps." There were beginning tears in her eyes.

"We'd better make the most of it," Devers said. "You know what I mean. It's going to *be* this way, now that our number came up."

She nodded. And then, after a frozen moment, he found himself kissing her. It was a tender, tremulous sort of kiss, and it had hardly started when it was interrupted by a harsh yell from Morgan's adjoining bubble.

"You hear something?" he asked.



"It sounded like Morgan. Do you think he's having trouble with Sherry?"

"*Hey, Devers! Help!*"

Mart stepped outside the bubble, into moonless blackness. He blinked, trying to see.

Morgan and Sherry were outside their dome, and Morgan was yelling. Dark shapes surrounded them.

"Get away!" Morgan yelled. "Devers! Run! Get help!"

Devers froze, not knowing which way to turn. Six or seven dark stubby figures—inhuman figures—clustered about the struggling Morgan and Sherry. Devers saw hunched, neckless silhouettes, thick shoulders, corded arms. . . . He was too sick to run.

Something cold grabbed him, and just then he heard Lora scream. Other colonists were coming, now. Devers squirmed, wriggled, kicked. He was held tight.

"Mart!"

"I can't do anything, Lora. They've got me too."

"It's the aliens," came Morgan's voice. "The ones Matthews saw. Hostile aliens." His booming voice seemed to carry all over the colony ground. "Aliens!"

Devers felt himself being hoisted from the ground. Two powerful hands gripped his ankles, two his shoulders. He swayed—and moved.

Dark shapes, and darker jungle. After a while, he stopped trying to break free.

Going up the side of the mountain was the worst part of the kidnaping, Devers thought.

The aliens had borne him through the thick forest endlessly. Perhaps it was two hours—it seemed more like two months. Finally they broke from the thicket and Devers could see the bald, bare faces of the jutting cliffs.

And they began to ascend.

The aliens had thick pads on their palms and on the soles of their feet. Suction pads. They gripped him firmly, at shoulders and feet, and started to ascend the naked face of the cliff. He swung dizzily back and forth as they rose, climbing the unvegetated rock as if it were a ladder.

Then the upwardness ended, just when Devers thought his mind would snap. They had arrived at a cave of some sort, hewn into the face of the rock. And there the aliens left him. They put him down with surprising gentleness, leaving him to lie in cold, moist sand, turned their backs on him, walked away.

He sensed other aliens moving about. He wondered if the whole colony were to be carried off and deposited here. *The survey team said the planet was uninhabited*, he thought reproachfully. *But Dave Matthews gets the last laugh.*

He thought about the interrupted kiss—the interrupted wedding-night. Then, about the interrupted colony.

A sound of sobbing came from somewhere to his right in the total dark.

As background he heard the gentle murmuring sound of flowing water, somewhere in the cave.

"Who's there?" he asked. "Who are you?"

"Lora. That you, Mart?"

"Yes. Where are you?"

"In sand, someplace. I can't see. What's going to happen to us?"

"I don't know," Devers said. "Don't move. I'll try to find you. Damn this darkness anyway!"

"Devers, is that you?" asked Morgan's voice.

It came from someplace deeper in the cave, highlighted by resonating echoes. "Yes," Devers said. "And Lora's here too. Anyone else?"

"I am," said Sherry Leon.

Her declaration echoed around the cavern. "I guess it's just the four of us, then," Morgan said flatly when the echoes died. "What the hell do they want with us?"

Nobody answered. Outside the cavern mouth the endless wind whipped around the mountains, whistling, moaning. Devers shivered. He had never experienced darkness of this sort before. He felt alone, very young, a little frightened, a little sick.

He started to crawl across the cold wet sands. Evidently the brook he heard ran not too deep under the sand, close enough to the surface to impart a chill, and came bubbling out a few hundred yards deeper in the cave. No one spoke; there was steady sobbing, but he had little hint of direction.

"Lora! Lora!"

On hands and knees he groped in the blackness. After minutes, a warm hand grazed his.

"Thank God," he said. Blindly he reached out and touched a yielding body. Arms gathered him in. He almost felt like sobbing.

He clung to her wordlessly in the darkness, as if the girl were the one real thing in a universe of cobwebbed nightmares. Gradually warmth came to him, and forgetfulness, and a stirring. After minutes of urgent action he relaxed, and after a while he slept.

Later, morning flooded brightly into the cavern. Devers woke reluctantly, groggily, from a bizarre dream of alien worlds. He looked around.

With a dull sense of shock he discovered he had spent his wedding-night with Sherry Leon. . . .

Daylight showed Lora lying about a hundred feet up-cavern, a pathetic little bundle sprawled on the sand. She was still asleep.

And at his side, Sherry also slept—her clothes disheveled, her bright blonde hair streaming every which way (*the hair I stroked so lovingly last night*, Devers thought guiltily). He felt as if he had soiled himself.

Morgan was there too, far back in the cavern. But he was awake. He was sitting up, arms clasped across his knees, looking amusedly at Devers.

"Seems you got mixed up a little last night," Morgan remarked wryly. He didn't look concerned. "Your gal's up here, you know."

Devers reddened. "I—it was dark—did you—?"

Morgan grinned and said, "Mistakes happen. No, I didn't touch your sweetie. Couldn't find her, to tell you the truth. But I'm not put out about Sherry. You weren't the first with her; I'm not going to be the last, either."

With one easy gesture Morgan pushed himself to his feet and came down-cavern. "These women will sleep through anything," he said. "Christ, you look awful."

"How am I supposed to feel? Who knows where the hell we are? What are those aliens planning to do to us—we may be stew by lunchtime." Devers' voice sounded thin and high in his ears.

"I doubt it. But let's take a look."

Together they moved to the lip of the cavern. Devers gasped.

They were at least eighty or a hundred feet above the flat, dull-brown surface of Siros. The cave was inset in an almost vertical rise of cliff. And on the distant ground below, a few of the aliens moved in aimless patterns.

"Look," Devers said. "That must be the colony, all the way out there!"

Morgan nodded. "A good ten miles or so. This is the damnest flat world I ever saw, except for these cliffs. . . . Nasty bunch down there."

Devers stared down at the aliens. They were yellow-brown—heavily furred, he saw, neckless, thick-bodied. He could make out the purpleness of the suction-pads on their palms.

"It's a long drop," Devers said.

The bigger man grinned. "Damned right. I'd say we're stuck here a while."

Thinking alike, they turned to survey their new home.

The cavern slanted downward, ending a long way back at a wall of rock beyond the penetrating range of the sunlight. Far to the back of the cave the little stream gushed forth, coursed along the cave floor, and dropped below the surface again, forming a small, fast-flowing narrow lake. The morning air was cold and brisk; the wind wailed past the cavern-mouth.

Devers felt hungry. "Suppose we're left here to starve to death?"

"We'll eat each other," Morgan said. "Women and children first." He yawned, showing sharp, strong teeth, and Devers half-thought he was serious.

Yet he was glad Morgan was here. The older man radiated strength and competence and courage, all attributes Devers knew he himself conspicuously lacked. Morgan was an adventurer. He had been a Volunteer. That took a kind of courage Devers could hardly begin to understand, and he respected Morgan for it.

"Let's go wake up the womenfolk," Morgan suggested.

The four of them stood around and looked at each other. Just looked. And Devers saw suddenly that life in the cave was going to be complicated.

Morgan was eyeing Lora's trim figure and high breasts with an unconcealed curiosity. Sherry seemed divided: she was glaring at Morgan in a wifely, almost henpecking manner, and yet frankly studying Devers in a way both maternal and openly possessive. The girl wanted everyone.

"We're not going to have much privacy," Morgan said at last, breaking a silence so taut it creaked. "I don't know how long we're stuck up here, either,

but I'd guess we don't get out until someone gets us out. It's a long way down."

"Those aliens," Lora said. "They're down there just *watching* us?"

Morgan nodded. "We're penned up here, and they can come get us any time they want. But we can't get out."

"And I don't suppose the colony gives much of a damn about us," said Sherry Leon.

Devers said, "The colony doesn't even know where we are. If there still *is* a colony."

Morgan nodded. "That's a point. They may have everybody cooped up, four to a cave. Or they may have snatched just us. There's no way of telling."

"What are we going to do about food?" Sherry Leon said.

Morgan shrugged. "We can't eat sand. Maybe the aliens will bring us something, maybe they won't."

"Suppose they don't?" Lora said.

"Then there are three things we can do. We can sit around in here and starve to death, we can take turns eating each other, or we can jump out of the front of the cave. I'd recommend the last idea. It's quicker."

It was getting close to noon, Devers figured, and he was awfully hungry. The wind hadn't let up its furious keening, and the sun was high overhead. He walked to the lip of the cavern, peered down the vertiginous height, saw the aliens looking upward at him. There were about twenty of them, clumped together below. He turned away.

Suddenly, he heard a thump behind him.

Surprised, Devers whirled and saw the purple suction-pad of an alien flash and disappear. A bundle lay at the mouth of the cave.

It was wrapped in a reddish-yellow animal hide, shaggy and rank, and tied with some sort of crude twine. Frowning, he undid the package, which was about the size of a man.

"Hey, food!" he yelled. "They brought us food!"

As the others came crowding around, he spread out the provisions. The largest item was a freshly killed animal, small, chunky, vaguely pig-like. A stiff little tail thrust out sharply at them. There was a deep gash in the animal's throat, but otherwise it was whole. Tied to it with twine was a short, sharp knife made of some shiny obsidian-like mineral.

There were also several clusters of milk-white fruits the size of large grapes, and some oblong, blue, gourd-like vegetables. Devers' mouth watered.

"Well," said Morgan, "apparently they intend to feed us. I hope they're not fattening us for a sacrifice."

"We'll find that out soon enough," said Devers. "When we get fed again. It may not be for a week."

Using the blade, Morgan sliced into the animal, while Devers and the women watched, fascinated. The big man carved with the skill of a professional butcher. He laid the animal open speedily, pulling back flaps in its underside, and scooped out the entrails. He dumped them to one side; they were slimy and oozing with blood. The blood was red.

"At least the alien blood is the right color," Morgan said, as he sliced chunks of meat from the creature.

Lora shuddered. "I've never eaten raw meat. Isn't there some way we can make a fire?"

"No," Morgan said emphatically. He glanced up. "I know you didn't want to come on this trip, baby. But you're here now. You'd better be ready for worse things than raw meat."

They ate—a strange, silent, almost shamefaced meal. Devers was hungry, but the sticky blood that ran between his fingers and pasted them together made him queasy, and he could see Lora having trouble choking the meat down. It had an odd, pungent taste about it, even raw, that made it more appealing than it might have been otherwise.

There were ten of the blue gourds. Morgan doled them out one to each and put the remaining six aside. "In case we don't get fed again too soon. These things keep. The meat won't."

The gourds tasted sour and had a stringy, unpleasant texture. But they were nourishing. Devers finished his quickly and turned to the white grapes. These were doughy, dry, and not very good.

When everyone was through, Morgan gathered together the remnants of the meal and hurled them from the cavemouth. After a distinct pause came the *thud* of landing.

"Why'd you do that?" Devers asked.

"To show them that we liked the stuff. No better way than to toss back a fleshless carcass. Anyway, we can't have that junk around here. Bad for sanitation."

Sherry Leon grinned uneasily. "Sanitation. Glad you brought that matter up. This hotel don't have such good furnishings."

"We'll set up a couple of latrines up here near the cavemouth. Better ventilation that way," Morgan said. "All the comforts of home."

"What's a latrine?" Lora asked.

"It's a hole in the ground, baby. Just a hole in the ground. You use it. One for menfolk, one for womenfolk, if you like."

"Oh," she said in a small voice. Devers felt embarrassed for her, and Sherry Leon's cold tinkling giggle didn't help any.

Morgan pointed upcavern, where the little stream split the sand into two roughly equal sectors. "Look here, Devers. You and Lora take the far corner up there, on the right. Sherry and I'll stay on the left, a little lower down. That's for sleeping. It's the best arrangement we can make. This place is like a goldfish bowl."

Devers shrugged. "We'll have to manage." He rose, walked to the front of the cave, peered out. Seven or eight aliens squatted on the ground below, looking up.

"They're watching us," he said. "Just *watching*. As if we're caged pets."

"Maybe we are," Morgan said. He scooped up a handful of moist sand, compressed it until it was a hard ball, and angrily tossed it down at the aliens.

It broke apart in midflight and showered harmlessly down. Morgan turned away, cursing.

Four people in an escape-proof cell a hundred yards long and perhaps fifty feet wide, without fire, without anything but themselves. And they hadn't learned yet to like each other much.

The day dragged horribly. There was nothing to do but stare at each other, talk, tell jokes. And there was little to talk about. Morgan spoke when he chose, and never just for the sake of speaking. Lora's conversation seemed to be limited to faint hopes and fears; Sherry's to dirty jokes and acid-tipped reminiscences. Devers found little to say to himself, and stared broodingly at his muddy feet.

"I opened at the Lido on the 24th," Sherry was saying. "Reverse strip. I came out in sequins and g-string and went off in an evening gown twenty feet long. Christ, I wish I had that evening gown. I wish I was back there. I wish I was anywhere."

"We aren't going to get out," said Lora in a dead-flat voice. "We're just going to stay here and rot. There are times I feel like jumping out and—"

"Lora!"

"Simmer down, Devers," Morgan said. "She hasn't done it yet." He stood up and stripped off his shirt and shoes. "I've got an idea. Not worth much, but at least I can try it."

"What are you going to do?" Devers asked.

Morgan unsnapped his trousers. "That underground stream. I'm going to get in there and wander around a little. Maybe it comes out somewhere—maybe we can get out the other side."

He picked up his clothes, and, wearing only briefs, walked upcavern to the place where the stream broke the surface of the cavern floor. "Come on with me, Devers. If you hear me yell, come in after me."

Morgan tossed down his clothes, stepped out of his briefs, and entered the water. It was knee-deep as he waded upcavern, then abruptly grew deeper.

Uneasily Devers said, "That's dangerous, Morgan. You may get trapped underneath somewhere. I won't hear you if you yell."

Morgan looked back. His lips were blue, and he was shivering, but he smiled. "So? What of it?"

He reached the point at which the stream dipped below ground level again and swept back into the mountain. Devers heard him suck breath in gaspingly, and then Morgan went under. Devers started to count.

*Thousand one, thousand two, thousand three . . .*

*. . . thousand ten . . .*

"Where is he?" Devers heard Sherry ask. He turned and saw both women standing behind him. That annoyed him; he didn't want Lora to see Morgan's naked body when and if he came out.

"He went under," he said. *Thousand fifteen . . . thousand twenty . . . thousand twenty-five . . .*

"Been gone half a minute," Devers said. He kicked off his shoes, knowing

he'd be expected to go in after Morgan and try to find him. He started to shiver a little . . . *thousand thirty-six* . . . How long could a man stay under water? Even a man like Morgan?

"You oughta go in and look for him," Sherry said. "He may be drowning."

"Yeah. I know." *Thousand forty* . . . The counting mechanism in his mind was functioning automatically now . . . *thousand forty-two* . . . With a cold hand Devers started to strip.

Suddenly Morgan broke surface, head first—leaping up high above the water, gasping for breath, plunging like a sounding whale. Choking, retching, he came up again, battled the swift current an instant or two, pulled himself to the edge of the water. Devers grabbed his arm and tugged him up on the sand. He was blue all over; great goosebumps covered him. He lay there, face down in the sand, drawing in breath with great sobbing sighs. Finally he looked up.

"Cold," he said. "*Cold!*"

"You find anything?" Devers asked.

Weakly Morgan shook his head. "Not a damned thing. Followed stream far as I could. Nothing. Came back . . . couldn't find outlet." His teeth chattered—he shivered uncontrollably, convulsively.

"He'll freeze to death," Lora said. "We ought to warm him up."

Devers felt angry. Morgan's wild swim had been nothing but a grandstand play; showboating, nothing more. "He'll warm up by himself," Devers grunted.

Sherry glared at him. "The hell he will. I'll take care of him." Devers looked at her, startled. The blonde was wriggling out of her clothes. He glanced away, reddening.

Whitely nude, she lay down in the sand next to Morgan. She put her arms around him.

"You go away," she said without looking up. "I'll keep him warm."

Later, as the big sun dipped toward night, the four of them sat at the cave-mouth, together and not together. The wind seemed to be blowing directly into the cave. No more food had come that day—the aliens obviously planned to give them just one meal a day, if that.

"We need a hostage," Morgan said, talking more to himself than the others. "It's the only way. Tomorrow we hang around the cave-mouth until they bring the food—if they bring the food. The alien shows up, we grab him."

"What good will that do?" Devers asked.

"I don't know. But it's *something*, dammit! You want to sit on your car in here forever, kid?"

"We probably will," said Sherry. "Like pets. Birds in a gilded cage. Why couldn't the bastards have picked someone else? Why us?"

Night was falling. Outside, an alien bonfire flickered. "They're watchin us," Devers said. "Watching all the time. They want to see what we'll do. They want to see how long it takes before we start fighting, before we hate each other's guts, before we start jumping off this damned cliff to get free."

"Shut up," Morgan said.

"I mean it! It's like a lab experiment. I had them in psych class, at college. You take four rats, see, and you stick them in a cage. Or you put them on a treadmill, and toss them some food when they look bushed. That's what we are. You wait until the rats start snapping at each other, until they drop from exhaustion."

"I told you to shut up," Morgan rumbled.

He got up and clamped one heavy hand on Devers' shoulder. "Look, kid, life's tough in here. Don't make it any tougher. Quit whining or I'll toss you out the cavemouth myself."

"Yeah," Devers snapped back. "You'd like that. Just you and the two girls in here—"

Morgan slapped him, hard.

Devers took the stinging blow the wrong way, neck held rigid, and it nearly broke him in two. After a second he said softly, "Sorry, Morgan. I didn't mean to push you. But you see it, don't you? We're doing just what the aliens want! They want to see which one of us cracks first, and how he does it! They want to see us fight. They want to see us tear each other apart."

"They're just primitive savages sitting round a bonfire," Morgan said. "You're making things up. You're making up things that don't exist."

"Maybe. Maybe." There was sudden tension in the cavern. The two women were silent. Devers looked at Morgan, and licked away the blood on his lip. "I tell you they're waiting to see us crack up."

"Well, we won't give 'em the satisfaction. We can hold out." Morgan looked toward the cavemouth. "Damned moonless planet. No light at all out there. We'll beat 'em, though. I tell you that."

"Don't kid yourself, Morgan," said Sherry, half to herself. "It won't take long."

In the darkness, Devers cradled Lora in his arms.

His wife. Hollow mockery of a honeymoon.

Beneath the constant bubbling of the stream came the sound of Morgan's harsh laughter, and Sherry's answering giggle. They were somewhere down-cavern. In the utter darkness, there was no knowing where.

Lora was warm, pliable, with a tense reserve of tight-strung nervousness. Out of nowhere she asked, "You slept with Sherry last night, didn't you?"

Even in the darkness, Devers reddened. "Does it matter? I didn't know what I was doing. She tricked me. She let me think it was you."

"Oh."

After a while she said, "How long can we stay like this? The four of us, I mean. I thought you and Morgan were going to fight today."

"Morgan can kill me with his pinky and thumb. It wouldn't have been much of a fight. But I asked for it. I started to crack up."

She pressed hard against him.

"That was your first time last night, wasn't it?" she asked.

"Yes." Hesitantly.

"Tonight's mine."



In three days, Devers was beginning to think cave life was almost bearable. People can get used to anything, he told himself. Even living in a cold, windy cave on an alien planet.

Food came regularly, about noon each day—the same thing each time, a newly killed beast, grapes, gourds. Morgan's plan of catching an alien and holding him as a hostage proved about as practicable as flying out of the cave, or walking insect-like down the side of the mountain. The aliens flung the food package in and vanished before the watching men could move. After two days, they abandoned the idea completely.

You could get used to anything. You could get used to slimy raw meat and to grapes that weren't grapes, to a latrine dug in the sand and to living without soap or depilator or any of the other pretty things of civilization.

It developed that Morgan had few inhibitions; Sherry, less. Devers and Lora were not quite so lucky, but they learned. They learned to take baths in daylight, when you could see what you were doing and get some of the filth off, and they learned not to listen to the sounds Morgan and Sherry made at night.

But the aliens kept constant watch and tension grew in the cave. It had to. Civilization didn't wash off as easily as all that.

It began with little things—little wormlike bickerings between them. Once Morgan objected when Devers took the largest share of the meat for himself, after Morgan had carved the day's meat allotment into four rough chunks.

"What's wrong?" Devers demanded. "You want that one for yourself?"

They snarled at each other for a second; then it died down. But it was part of the pattern.

And Sherry was halfway through an account of the perils of a chorus-girl when Lora suddenly said, with vehemence unusual for her, "How often are you going to tell that filthy story? I'm sick of it!"

"You don't like my stories, go somewhere. All we got to do is talk. So I'm talking."

"You don't have to talk the same things all the time!"

They yelled back and forth at each other for a minute or two, and next thing they were fighting, rolling over and over in a tangle of arms and legs, pulling hair, screaming, yelling. Lora was on top when Morgan and Devers pulled them apart.

The winds wailed. The aliens outside had increased in number to twenty or thirty.

The next incident came when Devers and Lora were bathing, on the fourth day. Lora had stripped, and crouched naked at the water's edge, cupping up handfuls and rubbing her face to break the shock of climbing in. A sort of convention had sprung up between them: when one couple bathed, the others busied themselves elsewhere. But Devers glanced around and saw Morgan leaning against the cave wall, watching them. Devers straightened angrily.

Morgan smiled coldly. "Something wrong?"

"What are you looking at?" Devers demanded.

"You want me to tell you?"

"Just keep your eyes where they belong!"

"Mart," Lora whispered, "don't make trouble. Don't start a ruckus. Just ignore him."

"No," he said. "There are some things you just don't do." He became aware of Sherry's mocking eyes on him, and Morgan's. "Get into the water," he said to Lora. "I don't want him looking at you that way."

He walked downcavern to Morgan. The older man towered above him. Devers said, "Are you trying to make it worse? You didn't have to look at her that way."

"I'll put my eyes wherever I damned please. And I'm tired of your niceness. This isn't any private hotel."

"You don't have to go out of your way to make life tough here," Devers returned. "I don't want you watching Lora when we bathe, from now on. We can at least *pretend* we're civilized—even if some of us aren't."

Morgan hit him. This time, Devers was ready for the blow; he rolled agilely and directed an open-handed slap at Morgan's face. The big man took it like the brush of a gnat's wing, laughed, and hit him. Devers sagged. He swung out wildly at Morgan, missed, swung again, and Morgan caught his flailing arm and twisted. Yelling, Devers tried to break loose, succeeded in clawing at Morgan's throat with his free arm. Morgan grabbed that too, and forced him to the ground.

"I'll put my eyes where I please," he said.

He gripped both of Devers' wrists in one big hand and slapped him a few times with the other, and threw him sprawling upcavern.

Devers lay there a little while. Lora came over. She was wet and still naked, but it didn't seem to bother her. She looked down at him, and he couldn't tell whether the look in her eyes was one of pity or contempt.

Later, he went to stare out the mouth of the cave. The clearing below was packed with aliens.

After that, there was a strange realignment of the tense relationship between the four people in the cave.

Devers suffered the most; he had acted foolishly, deliberately asking for the beating, and had lost status in Lora's eyes. That was clear. The only sort of respect she could have for him would be based on his intelligence—and he hadn't acted intelligently toward Morgan. Further, Lora really wanted a man who could take care of her—and he had not conspicuously proved himself that kind of person.

But sympathy came from an unexpected quarter—from Sherry, who glared at the invincibly self-sufficient Morgan, and offered soothing words to Devers. Morgan glared back. The swirl of conflicting emotions tightened. Both women half-loved and half-pitied Devers. Sherry was physically drawn to Morgan, and repelled by his dominance. Morgan claimed Sherry as his own, but quite clearly was interested in Lora as well. Around and around it went, while the aliens gathered outside, and the hours slid toward sundown.

Devers sat bitterly by himself, feeling that he was in disgrace. Sherry sang

softly; Lora did nothing. As for Morgan, he bathed, slept for a while, woke, and flattened himself strangely at the mouth of the cave, poking his head out and staring down. After a time he came over and spoke with Sherry for a while. Then, moving on, he went to Lora and nudged her.

Devers glanced up. Morgan was saying something to her.

Sherry took a seat at Dever's side. "Don't pay any attention," she said, as Devers clenched his fists. "It was bound to happen sooner or later. Don't make him hit you again."

"Is she going to listen to him?"

"I don't know. She may."

"I hate him," Devers said. "I hate both of them. If he wasn't so damned big—"

"He is," Sherry said. "So relax." She shook out her blonde hair. It was getting stringy from lack of combing, and beginning to darken at the roots.

After a long silence Sherry said, "You know, Morgan thinks he knows a way out of here."

"What?"

"Shh . . . He says there's a ledge down below that we might reach with a rope ladder made out of our clothes."

Devers scowled. "He's got no right to keep that to himself."

"Morgan never worries about rights. Besides, he doesn't think his idea would work. Maybe we could get down, but the aliens would just bring us right back."

Devers had to acknowledge the truth of that. The momentary hope died.

Shadows deepened in the cave as the angle of sunlight sharpened. Four days, Devers thought. Four days of just Morgan and Lora and Sherry. Would it go on forever? Forever. He remembered a line from some play he once had read or seen: *Hell is other people*. Whoever wrote that had been right, he thought.

Lora and Morgan were laughing, there at the back of the cave. Devers made himself sit still.

The sun dipped almost out of sight; just a few red flickers remained to the day. The eternal wind howled. He looked out into the gathering night.

"I wonder how the colony's doing," he said. "Whether they're still there or not. Whether they wonder about us."

"You're always thinking, aren't you? Well, they don't have time to wonder—if they're alive," Sherry said. "They're too busy."

The light went completely. In the dark, Devers heard Lora's laugh. It sounded strange, harsh, ugly. Topping it came the deep chuckle of Morgan.

"Time to go to bed," Morgan said. "The light's out."

"Yeah," Devers said. "Time to go to bed."

He glanced at Sherry, half-visible in the gloom, and she unmistakably shook her head.

"I'll sleep alone tonight," she said. "The novelty ought to be refreshing."

Morning. The fifth day.

Lora was red-eyed and sullen, after her night with Morgan. She bathed alone, early. Morgan washed up after her, and then Devers. Sherry skipped wash.

They ate silently, Morgan dividing the food as usual. The aliens seemed unusually thick below. After the meal, they retired to the corners of the cave. Lora. Morgan. Devers. Sherry.

"How long are we supposed to stay like this?" Sherry asked, her voice hard. "Staring at each other like mad kids."

"Shut up," Morgan growled.

"We don't like each other," Devers said. "You'd think the aliens picked us that way, to see what would happen. You'd—"

He stopped suddenly, got up, walked to the cave-mouth and looked down. As always, the height made him a little dizzy. "Yeah. Look at them," he said. "They sit down there as if they know what's happening up here. As if they're drinking in all the hate that's rising between us. As if—"

"Stop that crazy babble," Morgan said brusquely. "You hurt my ears."

Devers looked down, trying to see Morgan's ledge. Yes, there it was. Turning, he said to Morgan, "I understand you know how to get us out of here. Why the hell haven't you spoken up about it?"

"Who in hell told you that? It's not true!"

"The ledge," Sherry said. "You told me—"

Morgan slapped her. Then he said, "It won't work, anyway. Even if we got out, the aliens would put us back in."

"I know how to beat the aliens," Devers said.

Suddenly Lora started to laugh—a high shriek of a laugh, a sharply indrawn "Hoo-ha!" repeated over and over. She wasn't hysterical, though she was close to it.

"Keep quiet!" Devers shouted. "Let me talk!"

"We don't want to hear your crazy nonsense," Morgan said. "Shut your mouth."

Devers grinned oddly. There was only one way he could make Morgan listen to him. He jabbed the big man sharply in the ribs.

Morgan glared, astonished, and rumbled into action. His fists shot out blindly, crashing into Devers' stomach, pounding him under the heart. Devers fought back grimly, landed a solid blow on Morgan's lips. Then Morgan cracked him backward with two fast punches.

Devers landed hard, feeling pain lance up his body. He gasped for breath. Morgan stood over him, kicking him. Each blow was a new agony.

Finally it was over. Devers lay crumpled, shielding his face; Morgan stood over him, a strange expression of guilt beginning to cross his features. His lip was swelling.

Sitting up, Devers said hoarsely, "Okay. You were spoiling to kick me around, and now you did it. You got it all out of your system?"

Morgan looked drained of fight. He didn't speak. Devers mopped blood from his lips and went on.

He said, "Morgan, you're a strong man, and in some ways you're clever. But you couldn't figure a way out of here, and you were damned if you'd let me do it without beating me up first. Okay. I got beat up. Now listen to me: we can get out of here if we cooperate. All four of us.

"I don't know what kind of things those aliens are—but they aren't as primitive as they look. I think they grabbed us out of the colony and stuck us up here so they could listen in on our emotions, soak them up, feed on them. They took four of us. Four people who hardly knew one another, threw us in here, left us alone. They knew what would happen. They knew we'd start hating each other, that we'd fight and quarrel and build walls around ourselves. And it would be a sort of circus for them—a purge, maybe. Entertainment. Okay. They were right. And I'll bet they're out there now drinking it all up."

"Go on," Morgan said quietly.

"We don't *have* to hate each other. Sure, we get on each others' nerves, but we can turn the hate outwards. Hate *them*. And we can do that by loving each other instead of fighting. We're playing into their hands by bickering and brawling. Let's work together and try to understand each other. I'll admit I've been as bad as any of you that way. But if we do it—hell, we'll be of no more use to them than fighting cocks without any fight. And we can build that rope ladder and they'll let us go."

They were silent when he was finished. Finally Sherry said, "They're like parasites, then. Getting their kicks from our hate?"

"Exactly. Morgan, what do you say? You think the idea's worth anything?"

Morgan shrugged. "I don't give a damn. We can try it . . ."

At Dever's suggestion they relaxed for an hour or so, talking the situation out quietly, before starting to build the ladder. Sweating despite the chill, Devers led the discussion, showing as tactfully as he could that there was no real reason for discord in the cave.

Gradually he began to convince himself. It was the aliens who made him find Sherry instead of Lora that first night. The aliens had made Morgan stare at Lora, had brought on all the humiliation. Morgan hadn't really meant to take away Lora last night. They were just *people*. He didn't hate Morgan any more, or scatterheaded Lora, or cynical Sherry who had tricked him into a betrayal. They were only people. *Earth* people, and they each carried around their own unhappinesses.

And the others began to understand. Slowly, because they weren't quick-thinking people, the essential truth of their situation started to sink in. And the tension and distrust and hatred was washing out and draining away.

Then Devers asked, "Morgan, will you show us how to build this ladder of yours?"

"Let's start stripping," he said. He peeled off his shirt and trousers and tied them together, leg to sleeve.

Lora was wearing a skirt. She handed it over. "You want my slip too?" she asked.

"Yes, but later. Up at the top we need the sturdy stuff. Devers, give me your pants."

The line was growing—ten feet long now, twenty. At Morgan's direction Devers and Sherry roamed the cave, collecting the animal-hides the aliens had used to wrap the daily food bundles in. There were four of them. Morgan added them to the line.

"Okay," Morgan said finally. "Devers, get on the other end of this thing and pull."

Devers pulled, as hard as he could, digging into the sand to resist being dragged toward Morgan. The line held.

Morgan anchored it to a jutting rock with a swift loopover, and let it dangle free. He squinted speculatively and said, "Still a couple of feet short. Let's have underclothes."

Devers grinned and said, "Coming out of the cave's like being born. We come out naked." He shivered from the cold, but the new cameraderie warmed him.

Morgan said, "I'm going to climb down to the ledge. The girls will follow. Then you, Devers."

He grasped the line, tugged it to make sure it was fast, and lowered himself. He grinned, and Devers grinned back. "Good luck, Morgan."

"Thanks. I'll need it."

Devers watched as Morgan descended, swaying in the wind. He dangled at the end of the line, still a couple of feet short of the ledge. He let go; his feet scrambled for purchase, and then he stood solid.

"Okay. Next one down."

Lora went next, and Sherry after her, and then it was Devers' turn. Morgan caught him around the waist as he let go of the swinging line, and pulled him in to safety.

"We're still thirty-five feet from the ground," Devers said. "What now?"

"Now you all hold on to me while I try to yank our line loose," Morgan said. "Then we tie it on here, and do the same thing down to the ground."

He tugged at the line, grunting bitterly. Finally it snapped—in half.

"This is going to take teamwork," he said. "*Real* teamwork. I'll go down the rope. Devers, you follow, go right on down me and hang to my ankles. The girls will do the same, and jump when they reach your ankles. It can't be more than a six- or seven-foot drop from there."

And somehow, it worked. Somehow, they stood together—huddling naked at the base of the cliff, looking up at the two ropes dangling in the wind.

There wasn't an alien in sight.

And afterward came the time to fit back into a colony that had thought them dead.

Unsheathed guns greeted them as they appeared, footsore, dirty, chilled, at the colony stockade. Then a voice said, "Christ! Those aren't aliens! It's—"

They were led inside, covered with wraps, surrounded by perhaps ten

inquisitive colonists. Devers returned their glances strangely. None of them had been in the cave—and, in that measure, they were incomplete

"Where's Haas?" Devers said.

Dave Matthews appeared. "Haas—isn't here any more."

"The aliens get him?" Morgan asked.

"No. Not quite. After the aliens broke in here and got you, we had some trouble. A few of us thought Haas ought to quit as Colony Director. He—got killed."

"Where were you?" Lee Donaldson asked.

"We were in a cave," Devers said. "Prisoners." He felt very tired, and yet invigorated. Tougher, harder.

"Did they hurt you?" Donaldson asked.

Devers thought for a moment. "No," he said finally. He looked around. "Where is everybody? Busy?"

Donaldson looked away. Matthews said, "There's been trouble in the colony."

"Aliens?"

"No—each other. We sort of split into two groups. We don't get along much. It's a long story."

Devers sighed. He wanted to tell Matthews what they had learned in the cave, how the aliens thrived on strife, how the colony would never be free of the shadowy neckless things until they learned to function like parts of a well-machined instrument, as a colony should. But there was time for that later, he thought. You didn't make people see things in a minute, or in ten minutes.

He turned away. Suddenly he wanted to be alone with himself—with the new self that had come out of the cave. Something had grown with him in those five days, and it hadn't been just the silky beard stubbling his cheeks.

In the twilight he walked away from the group, down toward the bubble-home. His suitcase and Lora's still lay half-open on the ground.

He dressed slowly and stood for a long time, thinking. They would none of them be the same any more—not Morgan, who for the first time in his life had run into a problem he couldn't solve with his fists, or Lora, who had gone into the cave a virgin—in more than one sense—or Sherry, whose metal shell had broken open to give him a moment of tenderness.

But Devers knew he had changed most of all, and yet not changed. The thing that was inside him, the curiousness, the seeking mind—now it was alive and working for the first time. He realized he wanted to get out and see the aliens again, find out why they were the way they were, what they wanted from them in the cave, what they were really like. He wanted to learn more about this planet. . . . He was eager to start living.

*I'm different now.* It was a hard fact to assimilate. He realized with a jolt, looking at Lora's suitcase, that she was his wife. She was a nice girl and would make a good wife. . . . And he didn't want her any more. The boy Mart Devers had, but that boy no longer existed.

Someone was knocking outside the bubble. "Come on in," Devers said.

It was Sherry.

She looked flustered. "You just walked away," she said. "You okay?"

"I just wanted to think. I'm okay."

"Lora's with Morgan."

"I figured as much. I don't care. Really." It was funny, he thought, how lousy deals turned out to be the biggest things in your life. Being picked by the lottery, and then being grabbed by the aliens on top of that. And losing your girl to a man like Morgan. And none of it mattered—it was all just a beginning.

An animal honked in the forest, and Devers grinned. A whole world lay out there, waiting to have its secrets pried open in the years to come. And he'd do it.

Sherry stepped forward, awkwardly. He wanted to tell her that he loved her and needed her, and that he saw behind her toughness and the scars her life had left on her. But he couldn't quite say those things, and he realized he wasn't altogether finished growing up. She would help him, though. And he would help her.

The girl before him, looking at him tenderly, was like a stranger. Everything was oddly brand new. He tipped her face up the inch or two that separated them in height, and kissed her. Content, he put his arms around her and stood listening to the wind of the alien world—*his* world.

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# Michael Fessier

*Call a woman catty, and you call her something small-minded, vicious, gossipy, and, on the whole, a nasty, unpleasant female. But call her cat-like—and you evoke an image of languid, graceful stretching, of a rippling and most attractive body, of an independent and thoroughly proud spirit.*

## BEWITCHED

JULIE HATTON stood at the window of the library in her mother's gracious mansion on the banks of the Hudson near Weehawken and watched her cousin, Diane, playing tennis with George Parker. It was late in the year for tennis, but the day was a fine one. Julie clasped her hands together and lifted her blonde head heavenward, and her childish beautiful face was a picture of piety as she murmured, "Please, dear Lord, let her fall flat on her bumpy."

But the tall, dark-haired Diane did not fall on anything. Instead she leaped about the court like a gazelle, making her tall, bronzed opponent fight hard for every point. Mrs. Hatton, a plump little woman with bright blue eyes, came up to the window and stood beside Julie, studying the woe-begone look on her daughter's face.

"Why aren't you out there playing, dear?" she asked.

"In the first place," said Julie disconsolately, "I play a perfectly dreadful game. In the second place, Diane would do something horrible to me, like tripping me or accidentally bonking me with a tennis racket."

"Why don't you bonk her right back?" asked Mrs. Hatton.

"I'd probably botch it," said Julie glumly. "I'd probably miss her and hit myself in the brisket and George'd laugh at me. It isn't just the bonking, Mother. It's what Diane's been doing to me ever since we were children. She can make me feel clumsy from a standing start. All she has to do is look at me and I sprout extra thumbs and my two left feet grow three sizes larger."

Julie watched wistfully as a tawny cat flashed across the tennis court, leaped over the net, sneaked up the trunk of a tree and disappeared in the foliage.

"I wish," she said, "that I could handle my body like that."

"There's nothing wrong with your body," sniffed Mrs. Hatton, "and I imagine that, if the chips were down, you could handle it as well as the next one. What you need is that cat's disposition; not her physique. I just fed her and she's got a belly full of food. So what do you think she's doing up that tree? Admiring the scenery? I should say not. She's trying to kill a bird that she doesn't want and can't use for food—just for the sheer viciousness of it. That's what Diane's got that you haven't got."

"You mean that's good?" asked Julie.

"You could use some of it," said her mother. "Diane couldn't have more boy friends of her own if she were a stowaway on a submarine and yet when we trap an eligible male to this place as a house guest, she invites herself over and puts the snatch on him—just out of pure avarice."

"I know it," said Julie dolefully, "but I didn't care about the others. The only one I care about is George. I want to wash his back for the rest of his life."

"Well, you aren't getting anywhere just standing at the window mooning at him," said Mrs. Hatton. "Go out there and do something. Attract his attention."

"How?" asked Julie. "I'll bet if I were to take all my clothes off and set my hair afire he wouldn't give me a second look."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Hatton, shoving Julie toward the door. "Men'll run miles to see a fire."

Julie wandered out to that part of the tennis court inhabited by George Parker and stared adoringly at him. She wanted desperately for him to notice her and to speak to her, and yet she was afraid that he would. When men spoke to Julie she became inarticulate and felt clumsy and foolish, or, as Diane put it, "If a man says hello to Julie, she's stuck for an answer."

Finally enough balls went past George to make it necessary for him to retrieve them before the game could go on. He was stooping over picking them up when he bumped into Julie, who stood pressed against the backstop.

"Oh, I'm sorry," he said, straightening up. "I didn't see you, Julie."

Julie was about to say, "You never do," when she became suddenly emboldened and she said, "There's no need for you to chase these balls, George. I'll stay here and when they go by you I'll pick 'em up, and then when you need 'em I'll have 'em for you."

George stared curiously at Julie, noticed the promise of voluptuousness in her soft body, the half-veiled invitation in her eyes. Then, as usual, Julie began to shrink within herself, the promise of voluptuousness was dispelled, the invitation was withdrawn and Julie stood before him an awkward, embarrassed child.

"Well," said George uncomfortably, "I wouldn't want to put you to any trouble, Julie."

"And neither would I," said Diane as she came walking up to them, smiling with spurious friendliness at her cousin. "Naturally we wouldn't want you shagging balls for us, but if you want to get into the game, why don't you play George a couple of sets?" She extended her racket toward Julie.

"Go ahead, darling," she said, "and for Heaven's sakes, get rid of that absurd self-consciousness of yours, will you? Even if you do fall down a couple of times, George won't laugh at you." She smiled up at George. "Will you, George?"

"I sure wouldn't," said George and he gave Diane a look that, for a moment, was sharply disapproving.

Julie didn't notice that momentary look of disapproval. Knowing what Diane's diabolical power of suggestion would do to her in case she foolishly attempted to play tennis with George, she shrank from the proffered racket, then turned and walked awkwardly away, as usual leaving the field to her cousin.

She was wandering disconsolately in the garden when she noticed a gopher caught in a trap. The small creature gazed up at her with such poignantly pleading eyes that her heart went out to it.

"Oh, you poor little thing," said Julie.

She released the creature from the trap and, instead of darting back into its hole, it grew larger and larger and finally assumed the form and character of an elderly, white-haired woman who gazed at Julie out of grateful eyes.

"Heavens!" gasped Julie. "I thought you were a gopher."

"I was," said the elderly woman. "It's a good enough life if it weren't for the gardeners and the traps." Then she shrugged her shoulders. "Still and all," she said, "it's no worse than it was in the days of the Puritans. I got sick and tired of being burned whenever the populace was bored and didn't have anything to do. I tell you those were rugged days for a witch."

"Do you know," said Julie, vastly impressed, "that you're the very first witch I've ever met."

"I dare say," said the witch diffidently. "I'm a good witch, though. Name's Brock. H. K. Brock."

"I'm most awfully glad to know you, Mrs. Brock," said Julie.

"It's really *Miss*," said the witch, "but let it go. Hiram Brock was a wood carver friend of mine near Plymouth Rock. It was perfectly platonic, but, inasmuch as I underwent my fifth and last incineration on account of the affair I kept his name. You may call me Mrs. Brock, if you wish."

"Thank you kindly," said Julie.

"You're a very well-spoken and well-behaved lass for this day and age," said Mrs. Brock approvingly. Then she peered closely at Julie. "You seem sorely upset," she said. "What's the trouble, dear?"

Julie told Mrs. Brock all her troubles, especially those concerning Diane and George.

"I know how it is," said Mrs. Brock sympathetically. "Hiram had eyes only for a blonde choir singer and he couldn't see me for a bunch of scuppernong grapes until I changed myself into a cat and ran the simpering little hussy out of the town."

"Oh, my," said Julie, remembering her mother's remark about the tawny cat, "I wish I could do that."

"Be careful," warned Mrs. Brock. "Do you really?"

"Well," said Julie, after some thought, "I wouldn't want to be a really and truly cat; not one with a long tail and whiskers—just *sort* of a cat, with a cat's courage so's I wouldn't be afraid of Diane any more and I could fight her with her own weapons."

"My, my," said Mrs. Brock dubiously. "That's quite an order. I've never changed anyone into a *sort* of an animal before. I may be playing fast and loose with the laws of necromancy, but I'll try." She looked Julie in the eyes and muttered something under her breath. "I don't know just how it'll work out," she commented. "I'm not sure just what kind of a creature you'll be or for how long. You may fluctuate occasionally. I mean you may be one thing one minute and something else the next and there's no telling just when the changes will take place."

"I'll risk it," said Julie courageously. "When are you going to do whatever you're going to do?"

"It's already done," said Mrs. Brock.

"But," said Julie, "I don't feel a single bit different."

"Don't worry," said Mrs. Brock. "You will."

And she disappeared.

Julie wandered back toward the house and it occurred to her that she must have been daydreaming. It was utterly, preposterously, impossible that she should have just recently been talking to a gopher by the name of H. K. Brock. She walked back to the tennis court and watched a while as George fought to hold his own with Diane.

"What's the matter, George?" said Julie suddenly and much to her own amazement. "Is old knobby-knees giving you trouble? Here, hand me the bat and I'll show you how it's done."

While George stared at her, open-mouthed, she walked up to him, took the racket and two tennis balls from his hand and smacked a screaming service ace past the thunderstruck Diane. To prove that the first serve was no fluke Julie served another ace and then proceeded to give Diane a merciless beating. Finally Diane mendaciously claimed a sprained ankle and tottered off the court.

Then, all at once, Julie found herself alone with George and he was standing tall and bronzed before her staring down at her with a friendly grin and a light of admiration in his eyes.

"Julie," he said in a voice that thrilled Julie to the core of her being, "I just can't believe it."

And Julie found that she could not believe it either. She couldn't believe that she had defeated her cousin at tennis nor that she had had the effrontery to speak familiarly, almost impudently, to George Parker. Suddenly inarticulate, she dropped the tennis racket, placed her hand over her mouth and hurried for the house. Two nondescript cats appeared from the shrubbery and solemnly followed Julie. They would have gone into the house with her had she not shut the door in their faces.

That night Julie appeared just in time for dinner. She was in a subdued mood until the fish course was served.

"Goody!" she exclaimed. "Fish! Just what a growing girl needs to put meat on her bones."

She picked a broiled trout up in her hands and began to nibble at it delicately as her mother and George and Diane stared.

"For Pete's sake," snapped Diane, "where are your manners?"

"When fish is on the menu," said Julie complacently, "manners are superfluous. Of course," she went on, eying the trout critically, "this here fish has had the bejeebers cooked out of it. I prefer my fish raw."

"You mean rare," said George, who had been staring hard at Julie.

"I mean raw, Georgie," said Julie. "You'd be surprised at what vitamins you lose when you cook a fish. If you want to get the full food value and flavor out of a trout, eat him while he's still alive and screaming."

"Gracious!" said Mrs Hatton. "We learn something new every day, don't we?"

"Don't pay any attention to her," said Diane, who did not like the way George had been looking at Julie. "She's just showing off and, I might add, in a very disgusting manner."

"And as for you, Diane," said Julie, "if you'd eat more fish, either raw or cooked, you would not have such knobby knees. Which," she went on maliciously, "is one defect of yours that the vulcanizing industry can't cover up."

Taken off balance by this new frontal attack and again feeling a strange fear of her cousin, Diane lost control of her temper.

"I refuse to eat another bite at this table," she said furiously. She rose and looked at George. "Come on, George," she commanded, "it's time we dressed for the Bascombe party."

"I didn't know the Bascombes were having a party," said George, staring with rapt fascination at Julie.

"Well, you do now," said Diane.

George hesitated for a moment and then, from force of habit, he rose and followed Diane out of the room, darting quick backward looks at Julie as he made his exit. Mrs. Hatton was beaming at her daughter.

"Nice going," she said, "but whatever on earth has got into you, child?"

Julie drank a glass of milk, licked her lips with a delicate pink tongue, then stretched and yawned languorously.

"Nothing, Mother," she said. "I'm just sleepy."

George drove Diane home that night and, as he was helping her out of the car, he glanced up and stared unbelievably at what he saw. There, precariously perched on the peak of the roof and limned by the moon, was a girl. The girl saw George at the same time and she waved at him.

"Come on up," came Julie's voice. "The moon's fine."

"How on earth did you get up there?" shouted George.

"I climbed the trellis, of course," replied Julie. "Hurry, George, the moon won't last forever."

George glanced at the trellis and shuddered at its fragile, unreliable appearance. Then he looked around and spotted a tall ladder leaning against a tree.

"Don't you dare," hissed Diane, guessing his intentions. "Can't you see that she's only wearing a nightgown?"

"I don't care what she's wearing," said George with determination. "She's in danger. She might fall off there at any moment and break her neck."

"Any girl that'd wear such a *transparent* nightgown deserves to break her neck," said Diane. "George, I forbid you."

George ignored her. He carried the ladder to the house, leaned it against the roof and started to climb. Diane stalked away.

Julie watched with composure, occasionally offering a bit of advice, as George climbed the ladder and cautiously made his way up the steep slant of the roof to her side.

"The trellis would have been much quicker," she told him.

"Never mind that," said George severely. "What are you doing up here on the roof?"

"Why, I'm just looking at the moon," said Julie innocently. "What's wrong with that? For Heaven's sakes, what's biting you, Georgie? Can't a girl sit on a roof and watch the moon without being criticized?"

"A girl," said George, "can watch the moon from the ground. And, incidentally, she doesn't have to wear a nightgown for the purpose, either."

"Oh, the nightgown," said Julie indifferently. "Does it bother you, George? Shall I take it off?"

"Heaven forbid!" said George, panic-stricken. "Things are bad enough as they are. Come on, Julie, let me help you down."

"When I decide to get down, I won't need any help," said Julie. "But what's your hurry, Georgie? It's just the shank of the evening. Sit and talk to me."

"About what?" asked George.

"About you, for instance," said Julie. "Or, to be more specific, about your back. You've got a very presentable back, Georgie. Did you know that I've often longed to scrub your back, Georgie?"

"No, I didn't," said George nervously.

"Have you," said Julie, sidling closer to him, "ever wanted to scrub my back?"

"The notion of scrubbing your back," said George, "has never occurred to me."

"Now that it has," asked Julie, "doesn't it appeal to you? Don't be bashful, Georgie. Come right out like a man and admit you'd like to scrub my back."

"I would not," said George vehemently. "I mean I refuse to get involved in the discussion. This is neither the time nor place to discuss your back."

"All right, then," said Julie agreeably and she edged even closer to George. "We won't discuss it. Scratch my back, will you, Georgie. I'd like awfully for you to."

Without thinking, George started gently stroking Julie's back; her flesh was soft and warm beneath the flimsy nightgown. She placed her head on his shoulder.

"That feels good," she said dreamily. "I could almost purr."

"Really?" said George. Then he pulled away from her and stared at her, aghast. "You *are* purring," he said unbelievably.

"That's right," said Julie sleepily. "I am, aren't I?"

Again she leaned against his shoulder and sighed with contentment. George stared down at her; perhaps it was a trick of the moonlight, but her ears seemed, ever so slightly, pointed and tufted delicately with blonde hair, and her eyes seemed just a bit slanted. The purring, however, was no trick of the moonlight. It was a low, throbbing, melodious sound that made George's spine tingle and caused his blood to race intoxicatingly through his veins.

George sensed his danger; but it was a delicious danger, and he was too immersed in beauty, too drunk with desire to be afraid. He didn't understand what her being on the rooftop had to do with it and he didn't try to explain the purring, but he knew that suddenly Julie had ceased to be a child and was now a whole woman and he had to have her for the rest of his life.

"I love you," he murmured.

"Oh, do you, darling?" gasped Julie, and the purring sound grew soft.

Then George was conscious of a sharp pain in his right ear and he realized that Julie had bitten him. She was facing him, her teeth white in the moonlight and her eyes glowing with greenish fire.

"That," she said ominously, "is what you get for horsing around with Diane."

"It was you I always loved," said George defensively as he massaged his wounded ear, "but I didn't realize it. I—"

But Julie wasn't listening to him. She was staring at something in the distance.

"Holy smoke!" she exclaimed. "Look at that, will you?"

"Look at what?" asked George, slowly coming out of his delicious daze.

"At that cat with the whopping big fishbone," said Julie excitedly.

A large piebald tomcat was coming toward them across the rooftop. Upon seeing the two human intruders, he paused, dropped the fishbone he carried in his mouth, crouched over the treasure and snarled defiantly.

"What's so exciting about a cat with a fishbone?" George asked Julie.

"What's so exciting about it?" demanded Julie. "Why, I want it, of course, and if you were half a man, Georgie, you'd get it for me."

This shocked George back to a normal state of mind.

"I refuse," he said indignantly, "to become involved with a cat in a brawl over a fishbone."

"Then I will," said Julie with determination. "And don't be squeamish over that cat's property rights. Up here, it's the law of the jungle."

Before George could restrain her, Julie rose to her feet and started stealthily toward the tomcat. The cat snarled ferociously in warning and, when that did not dissuade Julie, he picked up the fishbone and scurried back into the shadows. Running with incredible swiftness and assurance, Julie followed her quarry out of sight. There was a brief, snarling argument and presently Julie appeared, strutting triumphantly over the rooftop, holding the fishbone.

"He put up a game fight," she said proudly, "but he was no match for me."



"And now that you stole the fishbone from the cat," said George, "what are you going to do with it?"

Julie sat down and stared dubiously at the fishbone. Suddenly she made a face and threw it away from her. Then she shivered and gazed dubiously at George.

"Is that you, George?" she asked. She stared about her and then looked back to George. "What are we doing up on the roof, George?" she asked petulantly. "I don't know how you did it, but I don't think it's very nice of you to bring me up here, George. Don't you realize that you could kill a girl that way? I'm afraid that I'll never be able to trust you again as long as I live, George."

"But you climbed up here yourself," said George incredulously, "by way of the trellis. Don't you remember?"

"Of course not," said Julie. "How could I ever have climbed up the trellis? I'm a coward."

As he stared at Julie, George was convinced that the pointed ears and the slanted eyes had, after all, only been a trick of the moonlight. Julie was the same as always, except that she was more frightened than usual.

"I think you've been sick," said George gently. "Come on, I'll help you down."

Slowly and carefully, George led Julie down the ladder into the house and to her room. He closed the door after her and then went down to the sitting room to brood over the night's adventure. Mrs. Hatton came into the room attired in a kimono. "What are you doing up so late, George?" she asked. "And what was all that howling and yelling and spitting on the roof?"

"That," said George, turning a haggard face to her, "was Julie."

"What on earth was Julie doing on the roof?" asked Mrs. Hatton.

"She was fighting a cat over a fishbone," said George.

"Heavens!" gasped Mrs. Hatton. "Did she get it?"

"She did," said George.

"Well, what do you know?" said Mrs. Hatton. Then she thought for a while. "What did Julie want with a fishbone?"

"I don't know," said George. "There's something mighty peculiar about Julie, Mrs. Hatton. I don't know how to explain it, but, for a while up there, your daughter seemed to have certain characteristics of a cat."

"Really?" asked Mrs. Hatton interestedly. "What kind of a cat?"

"What difference does it make?" demanded George irritably.

"Well, she's *my* daughter, isn't she?" demanded Mrs. Hatton defensively.

Suddenly there was a terrified scream from the vicinity of Diane's room and then a great hissing and meowing and caterwauling and a swelling sound as if all the cats in creation were joining in one mighty cacophony. George and Mrs. Hatton rushed through the living room and to the stairway. Diane's door burst open and, attired in a fur coat thrown over her pajamas, the dark-haired girl came running down the stairs, followed by a countless horde of cats, seemingly demented and filled with a lust for blood.

"Diane, darling," said Mrs. Hatton calmly as Diane came flying toward her, "what on earth were you doing with all those cats in your room?"

Diane leaped upon a chair and the cats all gathered around her, spitting and growling and making unintelligible, but nonetheless gruesome threats.

"Cats!" she gasped. "I woke up and there were hundreds of them, thousands of them in my room. The window was open and thousands more were coming in. They were all over the bed, on the dresser, on the mantel—everywhere—staring at me. And then I screamed and they screamed and then one of them—a great big one, the largest cat I've ever seen—bit me." She paused and touched a reddened spot on her throat. "There's something hellishly peculiar going on around here, Aunt Alice," she said.

"How so?" asked Mrs. Hatton.

"Because," said Diane, "that big cat that bit me looked strangely like Julie."

"What's all that ruckus?" came Julie's voice.

They all looked up to see Julie standing in her nightgown at the head of the stairs. "Did you," asked Mrs. Hatton mildly, "bite your cousin Diane on the neck?"

"Why, how absurd," said Julie, staring down the stairs. "Whatever gave you that idea?"

"Don't let her come close to me," cried Diane, almost hysterically. "She intends to kill me." She turned beseechingly to George. "George," she said, "I can't spend another minute in this house. I'm going home. Will you drive me there, darling?"

George tossed her some keys.

"I think," he said, "that I'd better stick around."

"I think," said Diane venomously, "that you're in cahoots with Julie and I'll get you both for it. I'll—"

The cats set up a more bloodthirsty yowling and a few of them stood on tiptoe and clawed at Diane's legs. She shrieked, leaped from the chair, sped across the living room and out the door. The animals followed her and soon there was the sound of a car speeding down the driveway trailed by a chorus of frustrated catcalls.

"Julie," said Mrs. Hatton reprovingly as her daughter reached the landing, "did you stick those cats onto your cousin Diane?"

"I might have," said Julie.

"How did you manage to coax so many of them into the room?" asked Mrs. Hatton. "I never saw so many cats in all my born days."

"I don't remember exactly," said Julie, "but it might have had something to do with H. K. Brock."

"Who," asked George, "is H. K. Brock?"

"A witch," said Julie simply.

"A witch?" said Mrs. Hatton. "I *knew* there was some reasonable explanation for all this."

Then Julie told them the story of her experience with H. K. Brock. After

she finished her story there was a long silence. Finally George shifted his feet, cleared his throat and spoke.

"I hate to admit it," he said, "but it all seems to make sense. You must have been bewitched, Julie, or else you wouldn't have bitten me on the ear up there."

"Did I?" asked Julie, blushing demurely. "Did I bite your ear, George?"

"You sure did," said George and then it seemed that the spell of the rooftop hadn't entirely left him. "And," he went on recklessly, "that sort of stuff's got to stop if we're to be married."

"Did you say married?" gasped Julie. "Is that what you said, George?"

"Providing," said George sternly, "that you go dig up that witch and call this whole absurd deal off."

"Must I?" wailed Julie. "From what I remember, it all seemed so strange and wonderful and exhilarating and I felt so brave and free and—"

"I refuse to marry a girl who chases stray tomcats over the rooftops," said George firmly.

"Well," said Julie docilely, "in that case, I guess I'll just have to go have a talk with H. K. Brock."

The next morning George and Mrs. Hatton watched as Julie walked across the lawn in quest of H. K. Brock. She seemed an inch taller as she strode lithely away from them, her steps so light that they hardly appeared to bend a blade of grass; her voluptuous body was a symphony of curves, controlled and in motion. George felt a catch in his throat.

"Are you sure," inquired Mrs. Hatton, "that you aren't making a mistake?"

George wavered for a moment, felt an impulse to call Julie back to his arms; and then he remembered the episode of the fishbone.

"No," he said emphatically.

Julie went on to the spot where she had last seen H. K. Brock, and the good witch appeared and listened attentively to what Julie had to say.

"Men," said H. K. Brock crossly after Julie had concluded her story, "never know what they want or when they're well off!" Then she shrugged. "All right," she went on, "if he thinks his ideas are better than mine, I'll just let him have his way."

Then she mumbled a few words and disappeared. As Julie turned away she caught her foot in a gopher hole and fell flat on her face. . . .

Three weeks later, George stood with Julie at the altar and, in response to a question which rolled from the preacher's lips like so many loaded dice, he answered, "I do." Then because it was expected of him he took an unresponsive, frightened child-woman in his arms and, after a perfunctory kiss, his eyes wandered over the wedding guests, many of whom were filing down the aisle after what they considered a rather uninspired performance.

Finally George spotted Diane standing to one side of the church. She was tall and vibrantly beautiful and her look was both an invitation and a promise and George disconsolately decided that he had bartered an available actuality for the memory of an illusion. As the thought formed in his mind, an elderly,

# Wilbur Daniel Steele . . .

*Is there perhaps a parallel between Thor's drinking bout with the Sea in Jutunheim and the utterly fantastic, utterly hilarious golf match between Mr. Bronson and the redoubtable Colonel Boogey (Bogey? Bogy? Bogie?) ? ? ?*

## the bogey man

I AM not a superstitious man; I do not believe easily. I do not believe that seeing the new moon over my right shoulder is going to affect my destiny in any way or that toads give warts. When I hit my shaving-mirror with an elbow and knocked it off the bureau and cracked it that morning, all it did, it made me mad. I never thought of it again until around noon at South Station when, at the gate to the Cape Cod train, I discovered that what I had just walked under was a ladder, where some men were fixing an arclight. What ho—next for a black cat, I grinned to myself. That's all the effect.

The reason I was going down Cape that November afternoon was to have a look at a pond a gun-club I represent (legally—I don't shoot) was thinking of leasing. At Shorewich, end of nowhere, I was offered a car for hire, but I distrust sand roads and wanted the exercise anyway. This I was to repent when, two hours later, going around and around the reedy perimeter of that pool lost in the moorlands, trying to decide where it was I had *started* to go around, a fog-bank from the Atlantic met a storm-cloud from the Bay and darkness gathered and rain fell.

If it was wilderness, it was far from trackless; sheep must have been run there, for paths went every way. There came a time in the weeping dusk when it was better to choose one of these rather than none, if only on faith. And when I had done this, as soon as my feet were on it I knew somehow it was the right one. And then this cat—one of those beasts which beastly summer-people will insist upon abandoning—this big,

gaunt, green-eyed black cat loped out of the huckleberry cover and across in front of me, and it was dismal dark overhead, and a dribble of cold rain was down my coat-collar, and I knew of a sudden it was not the right path at all. So I turned back and took another, and that was how at last I came to the putting-green.

How much of earth's surface I had covered, floundering in morass, high-hopping across brushed acres, while gloom of storm gave way little by little to that of hidden night, and a wind arose and howled down a hundred valleys of the moorland all naked and all alike, i cannot say. I don't want to think. I only know that when, climbing a steep rise covered with wiregrass, I felt my feet at large on a smooth flatness and a lean phantom walking toward me turned into a bamboo pin with a flag on it, I only know I said to myself it wasn't so, any part of it. And then, though I am not superstitious, I wished I had taken more care throughout the day.

I needed comfort, and it was a little thing that gave me it. On the neighboring tee stood a tee-box, and on the tee-box, when I went and hunkered down to peer, it said, "No. 12, 495, Par 4," in faded, peeling paint. But it was not this pigment of nowadays that warmed me, but a better one of other years beneath it (was even the paint of those years, then, stouter-thewed and truer-hearted?). For there in palimpsest under the flaking "Par 4" loomed the wraith of a "Bogey 5," and some of the cold went out of my heart, and "Aha!" I cried, not aloud, but in my mind. "Excellent man!" I exulted saltily, "Good old Colonel Bogey, they'll find it hard to kill you with a mere paint-brush, won't they, damn their eyes!"

I sat on the edge of the box and mused, insensible to rivers down my neck. Memories of simple-hearted, homely, scrubby links (not yet manicured and mistitled "courses") came to me; memories of the days when only those worthy of loafing were worthy of golfing, and when, when you shouldered your bag for an afternoon alone, you haled along out with you no such de-humanized, exanimate, super-infallible, billion-dollar, chrome-steel, rubber-cushioned gadget as a modern Par, to tramp and philosophize with, swear at, and shoot against, but this very most human old codger of myth, this tweed-and-briar-smelling Colonel of Foot, retired, with his little gimlet-grey eyes (I've always felt sure), his blistery red ears, and a complaint of the liver contracted in the Indian Service (I'm certain)—Bogey.

Ah, you (I mused) you sad, mechanical children of golf-in-quantity-production who will never know what it was to match wrists and epithets with the genial, peppery old goblin, so easy to out-drive with a well walloped ball (except that *his* would be down the middle), so satisfyingly testy about it when your brassie second to the pin lay certain to beat his pedestrian two putts if you were half as good as a blind cripple in getting your one down, and then (when you muffed it after all) so wryly, so dryly, so diabolically—well, you who've never had to hear the still, small chuckle of Colonel Bogey in your soul when you lifted your head in mid-putt—

So I was cogitating, sodden and sentimental, when the squawk of an astonished seabird brought me back to a realization of how silly I must look

even to a gull, and it was night and wet and I was nowhere, and I'd better be doing something about it. And immediately, as if to point a moral, I discerned far off between the layers of the rain a tiny glimmer, and I went that way.

Somebody said "Come in," and opening the door I entered. It was, as I had suspected, a club-house, and by the mixed light from an oil-lamp and a base-burner at which a man, nearly as soaked as I, was trying to dry himself, I perceived this to be the gentlemen's locker-room.

I said, "It's wet," and the man said, "It's wet."

"I must beg your pardon for intruding," I began, but he stopped me with a deprecating gesture—he seemed a deprecating sort all told; weedy-built, narrow-shouldered, out-odded in life's battle I dared say, and the seat of his trousers growing shiny as they dried—he stopped my apology as he made room by the stove door: "I was just going to beg yours, sir; I thought probably you belonged."

"Then you too—"

"I was collecting sea-shells on the shore out there—that's one of my hobbies, shell collecting. And then when it—when I—I'm afraid I'm catching my—catching my death." He tried to sneeze.

"Ah, so? Well, what about me? Why don't I have a shot too?"

"Shot?" His eyes avoided mine. "I myself don't drink."

I got my nose nearer, "You're a liar. Where is it?"

He had, at this time, no spunk. From beneath a bench he produced a nearly full bottle, which I couldn't name till I tried it.

"Not Scotch," I concluded, drying my lips.

"Perhaps you're right." He dried his on his sleeve. "It's not mine. I found it in that locker yonder. That's another of my hobbies, key-collecting. I've a great lot of keys."

Little as I liked the fellow, I felt so much better now that I chuckled, called him a burglar, pledged him moderately, and shook him by the hand. "My hobby is coin-collecting—all I can, ha-ha. J. G. Bronson, that's me."

"Boogy here. Your good health, Mr. Bronson."

"Here's same to you, Mr.—Boogy, did you say?" I had my mouth open to kid it—sure it wasn't Bokey, hey?—when his mouth fell open too and his eyes bulged. And me, something like a wind ran prickling up my back hair.

The sound, whatever it was, came from nowhere, and from everywhere, overhead, underfoot, from all the thin partitions of that hulk in wilderness. And it sounded, along with the rain and wind, like a death-moan.

"Good God! What's that?" My head went round and round.

Maybe these last few drinks had done it; the mild man lost his temper. "Don't ask me!" He got a bit of egg-crate from the pile by the stove and threw it in, to crackle and brighten. "I tell you I'm here till this storm's over, and she's not going to drive me out with any damn caterwaulings, and she is going to bring me something to eat!"

"She? Who? Eat? What?"

For answer he took a board and beat upon a wall with an exhibition of

choler which astounded me at the time (I have smiled since, bitterly). He ceased not until a latch clicked in the deep of the room and there appeared a female, vast, pallid and in a bad way. On a plate she bore a dessicated sandwich, rocked like a spent mariner on a doomed ship on a lee shore. Her thin lips flapped.

"Coming, sir, coming, coming, yes sir, here y'are, sir."

I wheeled on the dastard. "Boogy, you ought to be ashamed!"

Somewhat red of face, he sat down with the plate in his lap and pestered the sandwich around with a thumb, while the lips of the sufferer flapped on.

"Doin' the best I can—club's closed up for the season—don't calculate to expect the gentlemen—doin' the best I can—"

"Madam," I found my voice at last, "you're ill!"

"Mortal." It was a mortal groan.

"My God—you're here *alone*!"

"I am a widow woman."

"And you, like this, and no one—" I turned my eyes aghast upon the despicable Boogy. "—has offered to go get you a doctor?"

"No sir, no doctor for me, sir—it's far and they charge and I don't hold with 'em anyway—and—Oooohhhh!" I perceived her wrapping her large arms, as if trying to hold herself together. "Oooohhh, sir, if it's God's will, no doctor could help me anyhow." With that, tight in her own arms, as it were, she carried herself hurriedly away.

I could have killed Boogy and he knew it; the white of his eye was ingratiating as with one hand he offered me the dusty shard of bread and ham and sought to relieve me of the bottle with the other.

"I'm hungry, but you're hungrier, man; I'll just make a nip of that do me."

"Like fun you will! Eat, and pull yourself together. The ideal! You're not going and getting a doctor here long ago."

"Why don't you?"

I hearkened to the wet gale, and I nearly choked.

"Why you—you—You were here first, and you're warm and dried out."

"You're not, so it wouldn't make the difference."

I couldn't talk to this rat; couldn't trust myself. Rolling the empty bottle under a bench I longed for something inanimate to vent violence upon. In the open locker which he had vandalized I espied a driver. I yanked it forth; gave it a few savage waggles. But wait, hey, this was some club! Regarding a hypothetical ball on the floor I smacked it a mile, oh so sweetly.

"Don't jump at it, Bronson."

I gaped, I stared. "Did I hear you rightly to say—?"

"Don't jump at the ball. Let the club-head do some of it, man."

"Oh? So?" I had to smile (the little rat!). "You play?"

"Well—uh—that is—but *you* play a *lot*, I can see."

"Oh—occasionally—used to. Pretty rusty just now."

"I haven't had a club in my hands for—"

"I haven't had a club in my hands for—" We both stopped there.

The groan saved the situation. Through the frail walls, mortaller and awfuller than ever, it came and got us. Got me, anyway.

"Listen, Boogy, in the merest common human decency—" I fixed a glare upon him, and it was queer, the first hint I had of the fellow's duplicity. Very distinctly for a moment I saw two of him, two heads, four legs, astraddle of two benches there. "Pull yourself together!" I cried. "One of us, you or I, is getting that woman a doctor, hear me?"

"Wait." There had come a curious, preoccupied glitter to his eye. "I'll tell you what? We'll get us a ball and a couple of putters, and I'll putt you for it, Bronson, see which one goes."

I went hot, and, I imagine, crimson. It was eerie. Who had told this wretch about my game, whose one weakness, if it has one—

"Putting!" I sneered. I wagged the driver luxuriously. "Putting is something I can take or leave alone. Give me the long game, the strong game. Old men putt." I was sorry the instant I said it. For he was old. That, I now realized, was what was so weedy and mean and exasperating about him. He was an old, old man. Confused (partly too because the outer groans grew louder) I did a little shadow-driving, swinging the wood in the long, unhurried arc which has made me (people tell me) something of a terror on the tee.

"That's better you're getting it now." Boogy coughed meagerly. "But, man, if you'd only take it off your left foot more."

No, I would *not* lose my temper. I would not even hear.

"On my word, Bronson, you'd add twenty yards. I never drove three hundred in my life till the day I changed—"

"You? Three hundred?" It wasn't nice, the gaze I ran over his paltry skin and bones. He tickled me, though. I swished thoughtfully. "Oh, I don't know. So long as I can click off my three-twenty from this old stance . . ."

I saw him writhing, agonizing to call me a liar. "From a high tee—high on a high hill—with a gale o' wind behind ye and a baked-up fairway, me-laddie—once in your lifetime, maybe, lad."

The man angered me. "The matter with you is, you're drunk. You're so plastered you can't even pronou'ce English any more."

"From a verra high tee on a verra high hill, one lone time."

Now (partly because that poor woman was yelling) I yelled. "Boogy, if I can't take you out there and outdrive you by twenty yards, I—I'll go get the doctor gladly."

He laughed a small, dry laugh. "When, laddie? The morrow?"

"*Now*! Come look." I dragged him to a window where my eye had caught a greenish sheen. No wonder the woman had seemed so loud in the house; out of doors, while we argued, the wind had shifted and taken the wrack with it and died, and a moon at the full, an hour high above an ocean, whitened the night with a washed, unholy whiteness.

Boogy sighed. "Man, it could be done. Twenty yards, you said?"

"Though it's more like to be fifty I'll outdrive you."

"Man, man!" A gloat, a greed, known to golf alone. He went away



quickly and it was well he did; otherwise I must have kicked him. I don't mind golf, but there are other things after all for a sensitive man to take joy of; such things as a wave-crest breaking in a snowy thread on a sea blackened by moonlight, or moorgrass carpeting a cliff with a nap of diamonds, or (nearer yet) the slightly undulating, faintly winter-bitten velvet of an eighteenth green—a good green—a good, sporty green for a man to come home on, with five or six half-dollar syndicates tied up in the kind of rainbow putt you'd have to make if you had the bad luck to lie on the high side . . .

Something heavy, leathery and fat was thrust under my arm.

"Man, man! You to better me twenty yards. Lost ball, lost drive."

I looked down at the bag of clubs, of which he had the like.

"What's the idea, all these? For one tee-shot."

"Best just fetch 'em along, lad, in case."

He did not show me his eyes as he said it; indeed he was for the door, gnome-size under his stolen kit, me weak-witted at his heels. For surely, you will say, I ought at least to have begun to fathom him and his unholy purposes. Be it said for me however, my mind was more luminous than it was clear at the time (I'd had a few hookers, remember) and I was otherwise distracted by the noise of the woman out back, whom I was trying to help.

I have never seen the like of that first tee, hung on a cliff's edge high above a broil of surf, for beauty and peril. And the fairway before it, a sweep of silver toward cloudy bunkers on a moor-rise, had an eerie loveliness that night to take a man's breath away.

Nothing could take Boogy's. "Your bet, your honor, laddy-me-lad."

"Like fun! If I'm beating you, give me something to shoot at."

"The woman will ay be dead, before you'll be gettin' around to—"

"Quit using silly words!" I wouldn't argue. Teeing my ball moderately on sand, I addressed it without fiddle-faddle and with a nice pivot and a perfect backswing gave it all I had.

"Damn!" That went not alone for the tricks of moonshine but for the stentorian silence of the witness. I hadn't altogether missed the ball; it had catacornered off a few rods before it died.

I gave place to the adversary. As he addressed his teed ball fussily, from the most preposterous stance it has ever been my fortune to behold, again I could think of nothing but a gnome. A little moon-colored beastie that strangled a grunt as it swung a towering stroke.

I shall never forget his face then; he had missed it a mile. Since he said nothing, I said nothing. Putting a heel to the teed ball I paced the distance to my own.

"Twenty yards plus, Mister Boogy. Bad luck."

"Yerself." His face was a mask, pin-eyed, red-eared. "Astray out there? Did ye never hear of the hypotenuse of a triangle? Still on the tee here I lie but little further from the green we're shootin' for; I wouldna give ye seven yards the better, *on the line*."

I put my fists on my hips, spread my feet, stared at him. He had the gall

to seem to deliberate, then: "I'll tell ye, lad; we lie alike, a stroke each, eh? We'll play out the hole. That's fair."

"You teed up, and me in the rough!" I withered him by disdaining to argue. "All right, my dear sir. You're away."

This time the devil somehow really got it off. I couldn't see the flight, but it sounded clean. As for me, my lie wasn't too bad after all, still a workable brassie. The moon drowned my eyes as I swung, topped it again, and watched it into a sand trap up the way. Boogy observed that I'd have been wiser with an iron. I observed that it would be time for him to talk when he had located his drive.

"I shall find it. Strike the wee ball true and ye needna worry."

"Look, Boogy. I told you that bottle wasn't Scotch, so if you will kindly forget the highlands and try hill-billy for a while. Hear?"

"I was simply remarkin'—and no offense meant—hit the ball true and the ball goes true. Wait and see."

I got out of the trap expertly and lay up toward the bunker that stood a battlement against the sky, guarding the green. A nice pitch should put me on in four, not so bad by moonlight. But hey! A good pitch would put him on in three—I observed him looking for his drive, his second, just thereabouts.

Thereabouts, but where? He began to wag a head, squint an eye, peruse with a furtive uneasiness the rain-jewelled, moon-devilled sward. I refrained from whooping or even chortling; contented myself with remarking that he had five minutes to find it. In the meantime, if he didn't mind, I would shoot.

Next to a singing drive there's nothing for joy like a nice fat mashie-niblick for a pin. First and last, that towering pitch was the one shot my eye actually followed through; saw it bounce off the bunker-top onto what, with any justice, should be the green.

"*I'm on!*" My statement turned out more a rebel yell.

Boogy didn't seem to hear. He wasn't getting much of anywhere. In fact the last I saw of him, as I strode over the top, his circlings had carried him part way back toward the clubhouse. And by that time I wasn't interested, not in him.

It was like this. When I started up, it was in the assurance my ball was on the green. With every step, my imagination took one. Two easy putts, for a moonlit six? Two putts? What of the possibility that one—one long, fairly lucky putt—but wait. By the time I topped the bunker it had become a question whether it would prove so obviously a gi'me that even Boogy must say take-it like a gentleman.

There remained but one step after that. When I had walked down on that green and run my eye over the pale turf everywhere and found no white ball anywhere—and knew then *where it must be*—tiptoed to the pin, pulled the pin out, knelt down, held my breath and felt in the cup—and there was no ball whatsoever in the cup—when this happened, I say, revulsion overcame me and I wept.

It was not for any so small a thing as a hole at golf I wept; it was the whole and heavy total of the world's injustice since the dawn of time. (In

the plain fact, of course, it was merely that a share of a bottle of liquor, taken on an empty stomach and manfully denied a while, good and caught up with me now. At liberty to do so, the green got going around me, whirligig, and the moon, split in halves like a fruiting amoeba, around and around the sky and the sky around me. Me, man, mite, plaything of the insensate elements.)

How long I sat there revolving, mashie-niblick in one hand and pin in the other and tears raining down my cheeks, I cannot say. When Boogy came up and over, curiously swollen with things in his pockets and wearing on his head an object prodigious, shaggy, and to this day unexplained—I can only say it seemed I must have grown quite old.

He took my arm, got me up and eyed me. "What did ye make it in?"

"What in?"

"The hole, man, the hole."

"Oh, the hole. Well, Boogy, I made a four. A par four."

"Where's your ball?"

The way he said it reopened the floodgates. But they were no tears of repining now, but of strong anger. "Well, if that's all I get for holing out the finest hundred yard approach ever seen—and then, just because—because some sneak comes along before I could get here and—and—steals it out of the cup! If *that's* all I get!"

It was extraordinary, the change, with that. Sympathetic, understanding. A crime and a shame, he called it, and patted my back. He said: "Lookit, mannie, what ye need right now is a wee dram, that's all." And be-dam if he hadn't it on him, a blackish bottle this time, and he explained: "I found the bit, lookin' for more balls."

He was right; I felt immediately better. "More balls?"

"Oceans." He patted bulging pockets. "When I couldna find my—"

"Shay *could not*! And take that damned thing off your head!"

He obeyed, confused, and stuffed it partially in a hip pocket. As he led me by an arm toward the second tee, he recommenced.

"When I could not find my ball, and yours like to be—er—filched—I thoct to—*thought* to mysel', more balls will be wantit before this bit question is decidit. So back to the clubhouse—"

"Question? What question?" I recollected, and reddened. "By the way, Boogy, when you were down there, how—how were things?"

"Quiet." He tried to make it casual, but failed.

"Boogy, look at me. What do you mean, quiet?"

"Verra quiet, Bronson. Verra, verra, verra quiet."

I discovered I was already bare-headed, having left my hat somewhere. Not knowing what else to do, I wagged the driver with solemn hands. A sweet club. Its legal owner must have been a man of much my build and temper . . . But here, good God, for shame!

"Poor woman," I said simply. "I'm sorry."

Boogy, failing words, sought a symbol. He started to pour out a libation on the earth, but I stopped that. We weren't Greeks.

"So now," I observed, stooping to try and tee up the ball he had placed in my hand, "there's no reason left for our shooting any more."

He sighed. "And 'tis a bonny hole, this. Give it a look, lad."

It was him I gave the look. "Boogy, if you don't quit talking like—*Take that damned thing off your head!*"

Flushing slightly, he stuffed it in his pocket. Mollified, I carressed with the club-head the neighborhood of the little ball I hadn't the least intention of hitting down the lovely silver fairway inland. Though I could have, a mile.

"And 'twould ha' been your honor, man, the last bein' halfed."

Deliver me from golf nuts! A solemn inspiration came to me.

"Confound it, Boogy! This poor woman. Out-o-the-way spot, practically wilderness. Boogy, there *are* certain attentions that even *savages*—what I mean—ever laid out a body, Boogy? Because one of us is going to have to—"

"Done!" He shone. "And 'twill nae be me, lad. Hit the baw'."

I did. A mile. I guess. It was the last I ever saw of it.

Boogy must have been in league with Satan. Not only did he find his drive, but his second shot turned out to be lying on the green, when we found the green, not four feet from the pin. I had to point out, when he rimmed the cup and took a four, that a blind baby girl could have sunk it for a three and a birdie.

"Birdie?" He stood and studied me, wry, wizened jackanapes, his eyes no bigger than gimlet-points, his blistery ears supporting the weight of that mysterious, disreputable, hairy old tam-o'-shanter which nothing we could do seemed capable of keeping off his head at all permanently. "Birdie? Dinna be sae ignorant. What kith ha' I with such?"

I could have known, then and there. But I shut my mind, to defend it. That I was furious helped. To be beaten fairly is one thing; to be pick-pocketed out of two successive holes by luck like that is another.

Still, I resolved to give him one more chance.

"Well, Boogy, old man," I pledged him with the bottle. "I took the first with my four; you've taken this one. All even, eh-what?"

To my astonishment he did not blow up. There was even an eagerness in his: "Ay, we'll just ha' to play anither, me-lad. Come."

The first two holes had been petty pilfering as compared with the one to come, a shorty, one-eighty yards down from a high tee to a heavily trapped green in a hollow. The liquor would seem to have got him too, at this point. Choosing a three-iron he missed his teed ball completely. He did the same with a four-iron. With a mashie then he did connect, a wabbly loft which I'd swear wouldn't carry the green.

I felt released. A fearful weight was lifted. I gloated. "So you *can* miss, eh? Nothing but a lucky bum, and the luck's busted. There goes your three, and this hole is a three. *Yah!*"

He stood and studied me kindly, wistfully, shaking his head. It was queer; for the first time it seemed to me that some fraction of the moon's ray came on through him, the flesh of him not quite flesh.

"I have to laugh," said I. And I was the one who was right, when having

driven the green's edge, we descended and espied his ball safely top-side—though hardly a yard from the cup, be it said. The poor man looked so troubled, actually humanly troubled, that I couldn't find it in my heart to razz him. As I faced off for my approach putt, and he went off to mind the pin, I heard him muttering to himself: "I dinna, I canna, understand." But when my ball, away across the green, off-line and miles too strong, sought and found and caromed his into the damned cup, as Boogy bent to pick it out the human wonder cleared from his face, and only the inhuman sadness remained.

"Listen, you!" I came storming. "You're not going to *take* it."

"The book says ay, lad. 'Tis the cross I bear." My own ball, ten feet distant, he lost no time in batting to me. "A giftie, lad. Anither half. You're doin' brave, Mister Bronson."

On the next hole—or no, it must have been still another, the one where we finally threw the bottle away—but no, no. The hours of that occult, abominable night; the moor-weavings and moon-trippings of that travesty of a noble sport, it were better to forget as nearly as possible. One thing I cannot forget, however, and the shame of me, that in the end I ceased to struggle, ceased to be able to disbelieve. Under that skein of pars of his, each one as preposterously wrought as it was fantastically inevitable, little by little I was robbed of the power of amazement; hang-jawed, wobble-kneed, bog-eyed, I saw myself doomed never to be astounded any more.

As a matter of fact I was wrong. For when, the moon westering and the shadows long, and Boogy all moon and no shadow, we came to the green of a certain longish par-four and found his ball lying at three on the far edge—and when I knew as I minded the pin at his behest, as surely as I knew that that moon would rise another night I knew that that ball would come homing all the way and the cup at my feet would swallow it—I say, when this did *not* happen—when my eyes beheld the pellet lie down and die dead, twenty inches short—I was astounded.

It took the form of exaltation. I believe I did some sort of a slow dance, waving the flag and crying, "Yah! Yah!

"Yah, you faker, you duffer! Can't miss, eh? Well, this time you *have*. And *this* time I'm not putting, so *that's* out. Yah!"

He came treading softly. "Missed what, lad?"

"You know damn well; don't try to tell me par isn't four here!"

"Parr!" A flier of disdain. "Wha' kith ha' I wi' parr, girt lunkhead, savin' boogy is the like figger—the way 'twould appear to ha' been till here-now on this wee-feeblish links. But here-now we've a hole hard upon five hunderrd yarruds—sure a Gof-fearin' gowfer's boogy-five—and so stated on the tee-box back yonder, gin ye'd obsairved it, neath the peelin' paint o' these degenrut days."

I stared at the flag. It was so, the No. 12 of my wilderness dusk.

"For a God-fearin' gowfer," he reiterated, chuckling mournfully to himself as he bent to point the moral with his putt, had I not stopped him with a bellow.

"Wait, you! I know what you're trying to put over on me, but you can't. Because there's no such person, and you're not him."

He stood and leered. "Why am I na?"

"Because 'Boogy' isn't 'Bogey', damn you!"

"Ay, anciently." He stood and fleered. "In some parts."

He stood and crackled silently, stood and crackled as moonbeams crackle. "Why am I na, wee mannie?" The chuckle in it was all but obscene.

"Because—" I cried, doubling up the fists of my manhood; "Because—" I yelled, broadening my shoulders; "Because you're a myth, and a myth is nobody, and that's that, see? Because," I screamed, "if you're anybody, then toads give warts, and what's the use of colleges? Because," I sobbed, "if you're anything realer than just hooch on an empty stomach, then a thimbleful of atoms can't run the S.S. *Queen Elizabeth* across the ocean. And I won't stand for it—not over my dead body I won't stand for it, see?"

The beams he was woven of jiggled like gelatine, and the jiggles were mirth. "Braw lad! How can ye help it, say?"

"I'll tell you how." I narrowed my eyes and lowered and hardened my voice. "You make so much of bogey being a five here, and you being a five, so Boogy is Bogie, Q.E.D. Well, Mister, how do I know you'll be five? How do I know you'll not be six or seven? You haven't made that putt yet."

He looked down at the absurd twenty-incher. He yawned.

"*You haven't made that putt yet.*" The italics were mine.

He shrugged. He sneered quite openly. Bending, he prepared to tap the ball in one-handed. But there some weird sixth sense that is in moon-people told him to unbend and wheel, suspicion in his eyes.

"Gang awa'! Stand awa' from that cup!"

"I'll stand where I damn well please. Go on, 'Colonel,' putt."

An evil, a sly rageful look, twisted the cheese-green countenance.

"Verra weel, but I gie ye warnin'." Again he bent. And after a moment he said to me: "Tak yur great foot off that hole, and do it straighway, gin ye value yur life nae mair than a sparrow's."

"You and who else?" I guffawed. My other great foot then, gaily and heavily, I placed upon his ball.

And now he screeched a ghost-thin screech, the screech of the martinet of Bengal Rifles with his liver biting him.

"I gied ye the warnin' fair," he screeched.

"You and what other fable?" It bent me double.

Indistinct, ethereal, in the corner of one eye, I seemed to see the putter-head glimmering aloft. Distinct, solid, on the top of my cranium, I felt the kiss of iron . . . When I came to, it was broad day.

When I came to, and it was broad day, I was seated on a step of the clubhouse piazza leaning an enormous head (partly bandage) against a pillar. On opening one eye, the first thing I saw was a large, pale, middle-aged woman near me, rocking in a rocker. I reclosed the eye because it hurt, and also because, so, I could remember better.

"I thought you were dead," I remembered her, out loud.

"It always does seem like it's my last, until the soda works."

"How did I come here?"

"I've tried all sorts of doctor truck, and patent truck, and pepsin tablets and soda *mints*, but just plain soda out of the pantry—"

"How did I come here?"

"—though land knows it does take a sufferin' time sometimes, when I've et something . . . You? Oh, you and him, the other gentleman, you come in a little before sun-up. And the way you was walkin', and you with your head bunged, where you fell, I do believe the both of you'd been drinkin'."

I tried opening that eye again, I shut it again.

"Where is he?"

"The other gentleman? He's gone."

"How do you mean, gone?"

"I don't know. It was this way. He says he and you, you'd been some trouble to me, and he wanted to give me something before he left. And when he give it to me, I says, 'Oh, all that? Can't I give you some change back?' And he gets temp'ry and says yes, if I felt that way about it, and I marched in the house, and when I came out with the nickel, why, he wasn't here any longer."

"A nickel?" I got both eyes open and my weight up off the step. "A nickel change, did you say? Whatever did he give you?"

She held it out on a palm. "One single, solitary, shiny dime."

"Shiny" hardly did it justice. I took its thinness between my fingers. It wouldn't have done for matching; which was heads and which tails had long been beyond man's knowing. Finding my wallet I got out a substantial note and put it in her hand.

"May I keep this for *my* change?" My grin was somewhat sickly, I fear. She, it was plain, was feeling better about life.

"And welcome," she said. A mite puzzled.

"I—I have a friend, at Harvard, a numismatist."

"A—?"

"Numismatist. I'd like him to look this over."

Hooey! As though I needed Harvard help, or any other. Where my road of departure skirted a tidal water I took that pallid wraith of a strangled sixpence and threw it with all my strength out across the reed-beds.

It was no impulsive act, but a reasoned one. I am not a superstitious man, never have been, and don't propose at my time of life to start believing things.



Poul Anderson . . .



## *for the duration*

*You could trace the progress of our  
army by the sere grass and autumn leaves  
in midsummer. Curious that we, in the  
springtime of our hope, should bring  
with us this winter blast. . . .*

**T**HERE were four of them. Any one of them could have broken my back in his hands, but the Ns usually worked in teams of four, and came about four in the morning. That way, they were less hampered by crowds. People by day would gather to watch an N kicking in somebody's ribs, and get in the way, but during the empty darkness before sunrise the noise of boots only made them thank Hare that they weren't receiving such guests.

As a professor at the University, I rated a single room all to my own family. After the boys grew up and Sarah died, that meant living quite alone in an eight-foot cubicle. I was therefore unpopular with everyone else in the tenement, I suspect; but my job being to think, I *needed* privacy.



"Lewisohn?" It was a word spat out, not really a question, from the murk behind the flashbeam on my eyes.

I couldn't answer . . . my tongue was a block of wood between stiff jaws.

"It's him," grunted another voice. "Where's the gahdam switch?" He found it, and light glared from the ceiling.

I stumbled out of bed. "Get a move on, there," said the corporal. He took the bust of Nefertiti, one of the three inanimate things I loved, off the shelf and threw it at my feet. A piece of shattering plaster bruised me.

The second thing I loved, Sarah's picture, got a revolver barrel driven through it. One of the green-clad men started for the third item, my shelf of books, but the corporal halted him. "Cut it out, Joe," he said. "Doncha know the books go to Bloomington?"

"Naw. Fack?"

"Yeh. They say the Cinc collects 'em."

Joe wrinkled his narrow forehead in puzzlement. I could follow his thoughts, in some queasy corner of my brain. Eggheads are all suspect; the Cinc is above suspicion; therefore the Cinc cannot be an egghead. But eggheads read books . . .

Actually, Hare was a complex man. I had known him slightly, many years back when he was only an ambitious junior officer. He had a wide-ranging, inquisitive mind, and was a talented amateur cellist. He was not hostile to learning *per se*—he had plenty of thinkers on his own staff—what he distrusted was the mind which went too far. His saying: "This is not a time to question, it is a time to build," had become a national slogan.

"Getcha clothes on, fellow," said the corporal to me. "And pack a toothbrush—you'll be gone f'r quite a while."

"Hell, he won't need no toothbrush," said another N. "No teeth by tomorrow, see?" He laughed.

"Shut up. Arnold-Lewisohn-you-are-under-arrest-on-suspicion-of-violating-Section-10-of-the-Emergency-Reconstruction-Act." That was the catchall section, which had made most other laws obsolete.

At least they won't beat me here, I thought, wishing my poor skinny frame wouldn't shake so much. At least they'll wait till we get to the station. And it may take as much as half an hour to get there and book me and start beating me.

Or even longer, perhaps. Rumor had it that the Ns first quizzed a suspect under narco. If he didn't spill the beans, they concluded he must have been conditioned, and turned him over to the third-degree boys. But I would reveal nothing, because I knew nothing; therefore—

"My sons . . . they—" I fumbled my tongue in my mouth. "They haven't anything to do with— Could I—"

"No letters. Get a move on!"

I groped my way into my clothes. It was very dark and quiet in the street below the window. A roadable plane whispered down the pavement. I wondered where it was bound and on what errand.

"Let's go." The nearest N helped me along with a kick.

We went down the rotting stairs and came out on the sidewalk. The night air was cold and wet in my lungs. A car waited, with the Cross-and-Thunderbolt of the National Safety Corps luminous on its black flank.

The roadable plane came around the corner once more and slithered to a halt. Through hazed eyes, I saw a city police emblem on it. A man got out. "What the hell do you want?" snapped the corporal.

Then the gas rolled over us.

I retained a wisp of consciousness. As if from very far away, I saw myself fall to the pavement. One of the Ns managed to draw his revolver and shoot before he collapsed, but his shot went wild.

A tall man stooped over me. Beneath the wide-brimmed hat, his face was inhuman with a gas mask. He got me by the arms and dragged me to the plane. There were two others with him.

We taxied down the street and purred into the sky. The light-speckled sprawl of Des Moines fell away behind us, and we rode alone under friendly stars.

It took me a while to wake up and get over the post-anesthetic wretchedness. One of the men with me handed over a bottle. It was straight rum, and helped mightily.

The tall man in the front seat turned around. "You are Professor Lewisohn, aren't you?" he inquired anxiously. "Department of Cybernetics, New American University?"

"Yes," I mumbled.

"Good." His relief whistled out between his teeth. "I was afraid we might have rescued the wrong man. Not that we wouldn't like to rescue everyone, you understand, but we could only use *you* at the Hideout. Our intelligence service isn't perfect . . . we were told you were due to be picked up tonight, but sometimes the informers slip up."

I asked, idiotically: "Why tonight? You almost didn't make it. Why not earlier?"

"Think you'd have come . . . think you'd have believed public enemies like us, you with three sons to worry about?" he answered in a dispassionate tone. "Now you've *got* to join us. The Committee will warn your boys and help them disappear, but we can't hide them forever; the N Corps is bound to smell them out in time. So your only chance of saving them, as well as yourself, is to help stage a revolution inside a month."

"Me?" I squeaked.

"Achtmann wants a cyberneticist. You'll find out."

"Say, Bill." There was a Western twang in the voice at my left. "Been wonderin'—I'm new at this game—why'd you use the gas? I could'a plugged them four goons in four seconds."

The tall man at the controls chuckled. "I prefer gas in cases like this," he said. "Those Ns are already dead men—they let an egghead be taken away from them. This way, they'll be rather more slow about dying."

The Hideout was, of all places, Virginia City, Nevada. I could remember when it was a booming tourist trap, but in this era of scarcity and restrictions,

when nobody except the highest officials owned cars, it was a ghost town. A few bearded, half-crazy squatters remained, ignored by the police as harmless, shunned by the rancher and Renoite as unconventional and therefore possible subversives.

Only . . . when those grizzled forms had tottered into the underground rooms and joined the several hundred people who never looked on the sun, their backs straightened and their voices grew crisp and they were on the Committee for the Restoration of Freedom.

It took me some days to get used to the setup. Like most folk, I had thought of the Committee as being a few scattered lunatics—like some, I had often wished it were more. And it turned out to be more, much more.

But then, it had had fifteen years in which to organize.

"We began as a bare handful," said Achtmann. "I shouldn't say 'we,' I was only thirteen at the time, but my father was one of the founders. It's grown since then, believe me, it's grown. There are almost ten million men sworn to our cause, waiting for the word. We estimate another ten million will join us when we do rise, though of course without training and organization they can't offer much except moral support."

He was a rather short young man, but lithe as a cat. His eyes were blue blowtorch flames under a wheaten shock of hair. He was never still, and he chainsmoked from his rising before dawn to his going to bed sometime after midnight.

Only the Cinc and a few others could get that many cigarets. Achtmann consumed a month's ration in a day. But the underground felt privileged to contribute to him. I did too, after the first hour.

Because Achtmann was the last hope of free men.

"Ten million people?" It seemed an impossibly large number to keep concealed. "Good Lord, how—"

"Our agents sound out various prospects . . . oh, carefully, carefully," he explained. "The likeliest ones are finally given a narco and a psych profile is taken. If they're suitable, they're in. If not—" He grimaced. "Too bad. But we can't risk some stupid innocent pouring out the whole works."

I didn't like that part of it. I wondered if Kintyre, the tall man who directed my rescue and was fond of cats and children, if he had ever put a bullet through the head of some well-intentioned, unsuitable soul. To forget, I went on with practical questions.

"But the N dragnet must pull in some of . . . our . . . people now and then," I objected. "They must find out—"

"Oh, they do. They have a pretty fair estimate of our numbers, our general system. But so what? The organization is in cells; nobody in our rank and file knows more than four other members. There are countersigns, changed at irregular short intervals—we've learned, I tell you. In fifteen years, at the price of a good many lives and setbacks, we've learned."

Then, all at once, ten million seemed a ridiculously small number. Why, there were forty million in the armed forces and the reserves alone, not counting two million Ns and—

Achtmann grinned at me when I objected. "Just let us seize Bloomington, knock off Hare and enough Ns, and we've won. The bulk of the people are passive, they'll be too scared to act one way or another. The armed forces—well, some of them will fight, but you'd be surprised how many officers are Committee members. And in the N Corps itself—where d'you think we get all our information?" His finger stabbed at me, he spoke with his usual feverish haste. "Look, for a long time now, ever since World War II, mediocrity has been on the march. World War III and the Hare dictatorship have simply given mediocrity a gun and a club to enforce itself. Isn't that going to gall every able-minded man in the world? Didn't it chafe you? So the intelligent, inquiring people will tend to drift into our cause—we smuggle some of 'em back into the enemy's camp—and because of being able, they soon rise high in the enemy's ranks!"

He stubbed out his cigaret and prowled about the cluttered, dusty office. "I'll agree, ten million men, loosely organized, without an H-bomb to their name, can't overthrow a planet-wide empire as things are now. But you see, Lewisohn, we aren't just going to pit submachine guns against tanks. We're going to be equipped with a weapon that will make the tanks and bombs obsolete, worse than useless! And that's where you come in."

Let it be clearly understood, Hare was not a dog unleashed from hell. He was a strong, intelligent, not unkindly man who wrought enormous good. Don't forget, it was his work that the East and West coasts are again inhabited. Even though the radioactivity was gone, people were afraid to move back. He forced them back, gave them plows in their hands and earthworms in their soil, and regained a quarter of the continent.

I think, now, that Hare or someone like him was inevitable. After World War III, if you can call a few days of nuclear butchery followed by several years of starvation and chaos a war, the world power which is safety waited for the first country to become civilized again. Hare, an obscure brigadier, used his tattered command as a starting point. People came to him because he offered food and hope. So did other war lords, but Hare whipped them. Hare also whipped China and Egypt, when they made their own tries at supremacy, and turned all Earth into the Protectorate.

Yes, he was a dictator. But nothing else was possible. I had supported him myself, even fought in his army two decades ago. We needed a Cincinnati—then.

"For the duration of the emergency," read the Act of Congress. There was a handpicked Congress in Bloomington, and a frightened little shadow of a President, and a rubber-stamp Supreme Court. Under the law, Hare was only Commander-in-Chief of the National Safety Corps, an executive arm in the Department of Defense & Justice. His nominal superior was appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. He had retired from the Army to "maintain civilian control of government."

However, for the duration of the emergency the Cinc possessed extraordinary powers. And now we had rebuilt a great deal, and the world—if

not quiet or content—was safely under guard, and one might think the emergency was past.

Only somehow . . . well, there was the mutant typhus epidemic, and next year there was an uprising in Indonesia, and next year the Colorado Valley. Authority needed five million laborers, and next year there was a big scare about subversives, and so it went for twenty years.

Somehow, Cincinnatus never had gone back to his plow.

I didn't know the details of Committee organization. I didn't care to, wasn't allowed to, and didn't have time to. Let it merely be said that this was as carefully planned a coup as history has ever seen.

Not yet thirty, Achtmann *was* the revolution. Of course, he didn't handle all the details—he had staffs for the military, economic, and political aspects. But he kept his finger on everything, the flow of memos from his desk was incredible, and it was to him we all turned in our need.

Things just happened to work out that way. Achtmann's father had been the guiding genius of the early days, and the son had grown up at the father's side. When the old man was found dead over his desk one morning, the young man had naturally been called on for advice—nobody else knew as much of all the ramifications—and suddenly, two years later, the Board of Directors realized that they hadn't yet elected a new president and unanimously called on the boy-wonder.

The force shield was Achtmann's baby. His unappeasable reading appetite turned up an obscure article in a physics journal, published just before the war broke out, concerning an anomalous effect observed when an electric field of a certain high strength pulsed in a certain complex pattern of high frequencies. Achtmann called in one of his tame physicists, asked him what equipment would be needed, and had the equipment stolen piecemeal and smuggled to the Hideout. After two years of work, the possibility of a force shield became clear. In the next five years, the engineering details were hammered forth. A year later, a screen generator tested out successfully. Now, two years afterward, the parts were ready for assembly.

We didn't have the facilities to machine every part into identity. Therefore each unit had to be separately phased in, a delicate operation requiring a high-speed computer plugged into the generator circuit. I was there to service the computer.

I forgot about sleeping, almost, for the next three weeks. It was freedom I worked for, and my sons where they huddled in fear, and the memory of old Professor Biancini. The Ns might have found it necessary to string Biancini to a lamp post, but soaking him with gasoline and igniting him had been pure, pointless enthusiasm. . . .

Achtmann looked at me across the desk. His broad square face was very white, he was one of those who never dared go above ground. "Coffee?" he asked. "It's mostly chicory, but it's at least warm and wet."

"Thanks," I said.

"And you're really all done." His hand shook a little as he poured for me. "It seems hard to believe."

"The last unit was mounted and tested an hour ago," I said. "The trucks are already on their way."

"D-day." His eyes were empty, staring at the clock on the wall. "In forty-eight hours, then."

Suddenly he lowered his face into his hands. "What am I going to do?" he whispered.

I blinked at him. "Why . . . lead the revolution . . . aren't you?" I said after a long stillness.

"Oh, yes. Yes. But after that?" He leaned over the desk, shivering. "I like you, Professor. You're very like my father, did you know that? Only a more kindly man. My father was nothing but Revolution, the great holy cause. Can you imagine growing up under a man who was not a man but a disembodied will? Can you imagine never once, in fifteen years of youth and young manhood, never once laying down the load to have a glass of beer with your friends, kissing a girl, hearing a concert, steering a sailboat over blue water? I was seventeen years old when a young couple on a day's outing blundered into Virginia City and saw too much—I ordered them shot—me, seventeen years old." His face sank back into his hands. "A lot of decent people are going to die in the next week or so . . . not just on our side. My God, do you think after ordering that I can retire to—to—what am I *able* to become?"

It grew very quiet, below his heavy breathing.

"Get out," he said finally, not looking at me. "Report to General Thomas, logistics office. You'll be needed. We'll all be needed."

As civilians—on trains, buses, planes, trucks, from the whole continent, from scattered posts of empire around the planet—our army closed in on Bloomington. The movement was not caught by the usual traffic analysis, because a carefully engineered revolt had begun in Mexico. It was a revolt doomed and damned from the start, a diversion where ragged peons met flamethrowers, but such are the necessities of war.

At various points, small towns, farms, weed-grown fields not yet resettled, our units formed themselves and moved against the Capitol.

I am not a tactician, and I still don't know the details. My department was only the force screens. Each unit was centered around a heavy truck carrying a micropile to power a shield generator. Overhead went our aircraft, ridiculous little cubjets and limping machines salvaged from junk-heaps . . . but in every squadron one ship bore a generator.

The screen, when created, is only visible through a faint glow of ionization, as a sphere up to half a mile across. It permeates solid matter without noticeable effect. But it is a force of the same order as that which binds atomic nuclei together. And it forbids velocities above a few feet per second. A particle which travels faster and encounters the field is stopped cold, its energy of motion converted into heat.

So bullets, shells, shrapnel melt and fall to the ground. The detonation of a bomb, nuclear or chemical, involves high-speed molecules or electrons in the arming mechanism, so a bomb will not explode within the field.

Radioactive dust and gas disintegrate as usual, but the energetic fragments which would normally kill a man emerge as harmless ions. Chemical toxins remain effective, but are easily guarded against.

We had machine guns and light artillery electronically coupled to the screen generators. At the moment of firing, the screens went off for the few milliseconds needed to pass through a burst aimed at the enemy.

The N Corps had armored vehicles. They lurched, huge and threatening, up into the field; and their motors stopped and their guns wouldn't shoot. Our troops would plant a magnetic mine next to such a tank and continue. As soon as their progress carried the field beyond the stalled vehicle, the mine went off.

The screens were carefully heterodyned; they did not affect the motors of our own army, or the various cybernetic controls. We did use some rather primitive methods of communication, though, since field telephones and radio were nullified.

Destroying without being destroyed, we slugged our way into Bloomington. A thousand planes were called, and broke themselves against our impervious little air force. We commanded land and sky, and could not be stopped.

But it was a slow and brutal way to travel. The Ns and some Army units blocked us with sheer mass. We trampled them down, and men with bayonets rose to meet us inside our own screens, and we ran them down with tanks. A small atomic bomb exploded just outside the shield of our forward unit. Its gases and ions didn't get through, but the fireball light blinded some men, the infrared cooked others, the gamma radiation condemned a few to a long dying.

The bomb also remodeled several residential blocks, since by that time we had entered the city. Thereafter the enemy had to contend with mass panic.

Elsewhere in the nation, TV stations were seized and the film record of Achtmann played over and over. He was not a good speaker, but perhaps that only underlined the sincerity of what he told the world, that he had come to deliver men from slavery.

I rode in a jeep with Kintyre—maintenance division—as the inevitable shocks and accidents caused our generators to misbehave. It was bitterly cold inside the field, which strained out all the warm-air molecules. Afterwards you could trace our course by the sere grass and trees autumnal in midsummer. Racing from unit to unit, over smashed homes and ripped corpses, shell-pocked streets and disputed basements, I went from winter to summer and back again, and it seemed curious that we, in our springtime of hope, should bring this cold.

We bumped up to the Capitol through twilight. It was burning. A sentry passed us, and we entered the grounds. Our tires bit into lawns and flattened rosebeds. The familiar shield van was parked massive in the backyard, etched against the roar of heat and flame.

"It just quit on us," said the man with the colonel's brassard over sooty working clothes. "We want to put out this damn fire—hell, the records're

in there, maybe Hare himself. The screen'll stop the fire, but we can't get a flicker out of the generator."

I called for a lantern and went to look into the van. When I plugged in my testing unit, the problem was clear enough, the soldered connection of Tube 36 had broken loose. "Easy to fix," I grumbled in my weariness, "but I'm getting tired of it. All day it's been nothing but Tube 36 here, Tube 36 there."

"That's one of the bugs we can iron out later," said Kintyre.

"Later?" I began unscrewing the main plate. "Does there have to be a later? I thought—"

"Lot of holdouts, all over the world," said Kintyre. "Maybe you know more about it, Colonel, but I think we'll have a lot of stubborn little N fortresses to squelch."

"Oh, yes." The officer looked away from the flames. "Just got word there's an armored brigade on its way. It'll be here before sunrise, and we'll have to be ready to meet it."

"We seem to hold the city, though," drawled Kintyre. "What's left of it."

"I suppose we do. Messy business. Never thought it'd be this messy. But I'm only a general superintendent in a cannery. Heck of a note, ain't it, taking a cannery superintendent and slapping a brassard on him and calling him Colonel?"

I pulled away the faceplate and joined the broken connection and called for my soldering iron. A man handed it to me. He had a rifle in his other hand, and there was a smear of blood across his face.

"Wonder if old Hare got away," said Kintyre.

"Doubt it," said the colonel. "Not a plane of theirs got off the ground here. He's probably roasting right in this house. He had his own apartment in the Capitol, you know." He shifted on his feet and groped for a cigaret. "Damn it to hell," he said querulously, "we've got the lousiest QM in history. I ordered coffee half an hour ago."

I got the generator going. The temperature skidded down toward freezing and the flames went out as if a giant had snuffed them. Under the glare of headlights, men moved forward to probe the ruins.

"We'd better get back," said Kintyre to me.

"Wait a bit," I requested. "I'd like to know what became of Hare. He murdered quite a few good friends of mine."

The body was in the west wing apartment. It was not so burned as to be unrecognizable. He had shot his wife, to save her from the fire, but had met it himself.

The colonel looked away, sickly. "Wish they'd hurry up that coffee," he said. "All right, Sergeant, take a squad and put this thing up in front of the gates."

"What?" I asked.

"Achtmann's orders. He says we can't have a story growing up about Hare not being dead after all."

"Grisly thing to do," I said.



"Yeh," said the colonel. "But this is an emergency, you know, and we'll all have to do a lot of things we'd rather not, for the duration. Sergeant . . . no, he's busy . . . you there, Corporal, go find out what the hell became of that coffee."

I met my sons one by one, as they came out of hiding in response to the broadcasts. I could have kissed Achtmann's feet.

Then I returned to the University. I had my old room back, though so much housing had been destroyed in the revolution that I had to double up with another man.

The President had been killed by a stray bomb at Bloomington . . . poor little guy, nobody hated him. The Vice President and Cabinet had been strong Hare men. So Achtmann appointed a new executive branch. He himself refused all offices, and spent a month or so touring the country and receiving all the honors he could be given; then he returned to the capital. An election was to be held next year when things had quieted down.

In the meantime, of course, it was necessary to stamp out the remaining N bands, and the new Federal police had to be granted special powers if they were to track down all the Hareists hidden among ordinary folk. Some units of the Army attempted a counter-revolution and were suppressed. A crop failure in China required that a great deal of rice be requisitioned from Burma, which touched off a small but bloody war with the Burmese nationalists.

I hated to think of that. I had hoped we would get off the sorry road of empire and return to the rest of the world its freedom. A new party, the Libertarian, was being formed to run a slate for national office; its chief plank was the abolition of the Protectorate. I helped organize it locally. Our opponents were the more conservative Federationists. The government in Bloomington was non-partisan, a steering committee for the duration only; but of course it could not sit on its hands, it had to take some kind of positive action in every emergency, every day, it seemed.

In December the A.A.A.S. held a convention in Bloomington and I went, mostly to get away from the roommate assigned to me. We didn't like each other much.

I left the barracks and walked out into the grimy slush of winter streets. A few tattered Christmas decorations had been strung up, but there was no real sales campaign—there was no merchandise to speak of. However, the day before there had been a colorful military parade.

I walked under a low leaden sky, huddled into my overcoat. There weren't many people around, and none of them looked very cheerful. Well, that was understandable, with half the city still charred wreckage. But I missed the Salvation Army and their Christmas carols. Hare had done away with them years ago, on the grounds that private charity was too inefficient, and the new government had apparently not gotten around to rescinding his edict. The Salvation Army people had played badly and gallantly on winter corners when I was young, and it would have been pleasant to have them back.

I passed the Capitol. A new one was rising on the ruins of the old. It was supposed to be a very ornate and beautiful structure, which sounded odd when people were living in tarpaper shacks, but there was still only a steel skeleton, cold against the sky.

I wasn't going any special place. There were no meetings this afternoon which interested me. I only felt like walking. It was a shock when two large men grabbed my arms.

"Where you think you're going?"

I blinked. There was a high stone wall enclosing a large house to my left. "No place," I said. "Just out for a walk."

"Yeah? Let's see your ID."

I showed it to them. A car went past us, through the gates, with a bristling escort of armed men in grey uniforms. Maybe the new President lived here. I hadn't seen a newscast in weeks, too busy.

Hands patted me, feeling for weapons. "I guess he's okay," said one of the men.

"Yeah. On your way, Lewisohn, and don't come through this block again. Restricted. Didn't you see the signs?"

A man in peacock livery came running out of the gate. "Hey, there!" he called. "Stop!"

We halted. The man bowed to me. "Are you Professor Lewisohn, sir?" he asked. I nodded. "Then please come with me." I couldn't resist a smug grin at the Secret Service boys.

We went up a landscaped driveway and through a door. There were sentries on the porch, but inside, it was all butlers and luxury. At the end of a paneled corridor was a long room with a broad picture window overlooking a glass-roofed garden, tropical in midwinter.

The man who stood there turned around as I entered. "Prof!" he said delightedly. "Come in, for heaven's sake. Have a drink."

It was Achtmann, colorful in lounging pajamas but still the same chain-smoking, unrestful Achtmann. He took my coat and handed it to a servant. Another servant materialized with Scotch on the rocks. I found myself in an armchair, with Achtmann pacing up and down before me.

"Good Lord," he said. "I had no idea you were in town, old fellow. If I hadn't happened to see you from my car . . . Why didn't you let me know? My secretaries have a list of Committee members, and any letter from one of them goes directly to me."

"I . . . out of touch—" I sipped carefully, seeking balance. "Busy and, well, under present conditions I've sort of lost contact and—"

"What conditions?" His eyes stabbed at me. "Anything wrong?"

"Oh, no, no. Tight housing, tight schedule, the usual."

"Like hell it's usual. Not for anybody who did what you did." Achtmann whirled on a dictograph. "I can guess your troubles—lousy little room, lousy commoner's ration, lousy pay . . . eh? Okay, we'll fix it." He rattled an order into the tube: effective immediately, Professor Lewisohn was to have a house

at his disposal, funds equivalent to, etc., ration-free ID, etc., etc. "Why didn't you let me know?" he finished. "I've set up all the other boys from the old Hideout gang, or most of them."

"But I don't want—" I stammered. "I don't deserve—don't throw somebody out of their house just to—"

"Shut up," he laughed. It was a boy's laugh, but there was a metal note behind it. "Quite apart from gratitude and solidarity and all that sort of thing, it's sound policy, and I won't hear no from you. The populace at large need the carrot as well as the stick. They've not only got to realize that the disloyal are punished, but see how the loyal get rewarded. Savvy?"

"What the hell kind of office do you have?" I whispered.

"Office? Position? None whatsoever. That's the beauty of it. I'm just an unofficial adviser to the President." Achtmann shrugged, wryly. "*Primus inter pares*. Somebody has to be, you realize, and I have a large following of trained men personally loyal to me, which is a big help, and this job . . . oh, call it leadership . . . is all I was ever trained for. It works out pretty well, don't you think?"

"For you it does," I said thinly.

"Hell! You think I want a hundred nosy servants under my roof? It's just part of the show I have to put on. It was Hare's mistake, being so drably correct, he never gave anyone a vicarious thrill. You can't steer an entire world out of ruin without giving it a Leader in great big capital letters."

"I thought that was what you fought against," I whispered.

"It was. It still is. Of course! Only there's so much to do. We can't turn over the reins in a week to people who for a generation haven't been allowed to do their own thinking. We can't reinstate search warrants, and habeas corpus, and due process in political trials, when several million men are plotting and jockeying to restore the dictatorship. There are still a lot of devout Hareists, you know, not to mention a hundred little lunatic groups with their own exclusive schemes for saving mankind." Achtmann lit another cigaret from the stub in his mouth.

Words, cold as ice, rattled out of him. "We can't dissolve the Protectorate and turn the foreign provinces loose, not till they've been educated and civilized, or there'll soon be another atomic war to fight. And here at home, there's so much poverty and hunger . . . how interested do you think a man is in democratic government when his children don't have bread? If we allowed it, he'd follow the first tinpot, crackpot Fuehrer who promised to feed him. We've got to restore the economy, the—"

I surprised myself by interrupting him. "For your information," I said, "I'm in the Libertarian Party."

"No matter," answered Achtmann cheerfully. "It won't be held against you. When the political parties are dissolved, it'll simply be a question of—"

"*Dissolved!*" I choked. "But there was to be an election—"

"I'm afraid it'll have to wait a few years. Honestly, old fellow, how do you think we could hold an election with conditions what they are? I thought we could, that's why it was announced, but since then I've picked up enough

(Continued on page 65.)

# Anthony Boucher

a deftly told, chilling account  
of a doctor who possibly wasn't,  
and the curious nature of. . .

## the pink caterpillar

NORM HARKER said, "Their medicine men can do time travel, too. At least, that's the firm belief everywhere on the island: a *tualala* can go forward in time and bring back any single item you specify, for a price. We used to spend the night watches speculating on what would be the one best thing to order."

Norman hadn't told us the name of the island. The stripe and a half on his sleeve lent him discretion; and Tokyo hadn't learned yet what secret installations the Navy had been busy with on that minute portion of the South Pacific. He couldn't talk about the installations, of course; but the island had provided him with plenty of other matters to keep us entertained, up there in the Top of the Mark.

"What would you order, Tony," he asked, "with a *carte blanche* like that on the future?"

"How far future?"

"They say a *tualala* goes to one hundred years from date, exactly."

"Money wouldn't work," I mused. "Jewels, maybe. Or a gadget—any gadget—and you could invent it as of now and make a fortune. But then it might depend on principles not yet worked out. . . . Or the *Gone With the Wind* of the twenty-first century—but publish it now and it could lay an egg. Can you imagine today's best sellers trying to compete with Dickens? No, it's a tricky question. What did you try?"

"We finally settled on Khrushchev's tombstone. Think of the admission tickets we could sell to see that!"

"And?"

"And nothing. We couldn't pay the *tualala*'s price. For each article fetched through time he wanted one virgin from the neighboring island. We felt the staff somehow might not understand if we went collecting them. There's always a catch to magic," Norman concluded lightly.

Fergus O'Brien said, "Uh-huh," and nodded gravely. He hadn't been

saying much all evening—just sitting there and looking out over the panorama of the Bay by night, a glistening joy, now that dimout was over, and taking in Norm's stories. I still don't know the sort of work he's been doing, but it's changing him, toning him down.

But even a toned-down Irishman can stand only so much silence, and there was obviously a story ready on his lips. Norm asked, "You've been running into magic, too?"

"Not lately." Fergus held his drink up to the light. "Damned if I know why writers always call a highball an amber liquid," he observed. "Start a cliché and it sticks. . . . Like about detectives being hard-headed realists. Didn't you ever stop to think that there's hardly another profession outside the clergy that's so apt to run up against the things beyond realism? Why do you call in a detective? Because something screwy's going on and you need an explanation. And if there isn't an explanation . . .

"This was back a ways. Back when I didn't have anything worse to deal with than murderers, and once a werewolf. But he was a hell of a swell guy. The murderers I used to think were pretty thorough low-lives, but now . . . Anyway, this was back then. I was down in Mexico putting the finishing touches on a case when I heard from Dan Rafetti. I think you know him, Tony—he's an investigator for Southwest National Life Insurance, and he's thrown some business my way now and then.

"This one sounded interesting. Nothing spectacular, you understand, and probably no money to speak of. But the kind of crazy, unexplained little detail that stirs up the O'Brien curiosity. Very simple: Southwest gets a claim from a beneficiary. One of their customers died down in Mexico, and his sister wants the cash. They sent to the Mexican authorities for a report on his death and it was heart failure and that's that. Only the policy is made out to Mr. Frank Miller and the Mexican report refers to him as *Dr. F. Miller*. They ask the sister and she's certain he hadn't any right to such a title. So I happen to be right near Tlitchotl, where he died, and would I please kind of nose around and see was there anything phony, like maybe an imposture. Photographs and fingerprints—from a civil service application he once made—enclosed."

"Nice businesslike beginning," Norm said.

Fergus nodded. "That's the way it started, all very routine, yours-of-the-27th-*ult.* Prosaic-like. And Tlitchotl was prosaic enough, too. Maybe to a tourist it'd be picturesque, but I'd been kicking around these Mexican mountain towns long enough so one seemed as commonplace as another. Sort of a montage of flat houses and white trousers and dogs and children and an old church and an almost-as-old *pulquería* and one *tipo* that plays a hell of a guitar on Saturday nights.

"Tlitchotl wasn't much different. There was a mine near it, and just out of town was a bunch of drab new frame houses for the American engineers. Everybody in town worked in the mine—all pure Indians, with those chaste profiles straight off of Aztec murals that begin to seem like the only right and normal human face when you've been among 'em long enough.

"I went to the doctor first. He was the government sanitation agent and health instructor, and the town looked like he was doing a good job. His English was better than my Spanish and he was glad I liked tequila. Yes, he remembered Dr. Miller. He checked up his records, announced that Dr. M. had died on November Second. It was January when I talked to him. Simple death; heart failure. He'd had several attacks in the previous weeks, and the doctor had expected him to go any day. All of a sudden a friend he hadn't seen in years showed up in town unannounced, and the shock did it. Any little thing might have.

"The doctor wasn't a stupid man, or a careless one. I was willing to take his word that the death was natural—and maybe I ought to put in here, before your devious minds start getting ahead of me, that as far as I ever learned he was absolutely right. Common- or garden-variety of heart failure, and that didn't fit into any picture of insurance fraud. But there was still the inconsistency of the title, and I went on, 'Must've been kind of nice for you to have a colleague here to talk with?'

"The doctor frowned a little at that. It seemed he's been sort of hurt by Dr. Miller's attitude. He'd tried to interest him in some researches he was doing with an endemic variant of undulant fever, which he'd practically succeeded in wiping out. But the North American doctor just didn't give a damn. No fraternal spirit, no scientific curiosity, nothing.

"I gathered they hadn't been very friendly, my doctor and Dr. Miller. In fact, Miller hadn't been intimate with anybody, not even the other North Americans at the mine. He liked the Indians and they liked him, though they were a little scared of him on account of the skeleton—apparently an anatomical specimen and the first thing I'd heard of to go with his assumed doctorate. He had a good shortwave radio and he listened to music on that and sketched a little and read and went for short hikes. It sounded like a good life, if you like a lonely one. The doc thought they might know a little more about him at the *pulquería*; he stopped there for a drink sometimes. And the widow Sánchez kept house for him; she might know something.

"I tried the widow first. She wore a shapeless black dress that looked as though she'd started mourning Mr. Sánchez ten years ago, but the youngest wasn't quite walking yet. She liked her late employer, might he rest in peace. He was a good man, and so little trouble. No, he never gave medicine to anybody; that was the job of the *señor médico* from Mexico City. No, he never did anything with bottles. No, he never received much mail and surely not with money in it, for she often saw him open his few letters. But yes, indeed, he was a *médico*; did he not have the bones, the *esqueleto* to prove it?

"And if the *señor* interested himself so much in *el doctor* Miller, perhaps the the *señor* would care to see his house? It was untouched, as he left it. No one lived there now. No, it was not haunted—at least, not that anyone knew, though no man knows about such things. It was only that no one new ever comes to live in Tlichotl, and an empty house stays empty.

"I looked the house over. It had two rooms and a kitchen and a tiny patio. Dr. Miller's things were undisturbed; no one had claimed them, and it was

up to time and heat and insects to take care of them. There was the radio and beside it the sketching materials. One wall was a bookcase, well filled, mostly with sixteenth and seventeenth century literature in English and Spanish. The books had been faithfully read. There were a few recent volumes, mostly on travel or on Mexican Indian culture, and a few magazines. No medical books or periodicals.

"Food, cooking utensils, clothing, a pile of sketches—good enough so you'd feel all right when you'd done them and bad enough so you wouldn't feel urged to exhibit them—pipes and tobacco. These just about made up the inventory. No papers to speak of, a few personal letters, mostly from his sister (and beneficiary). No instruments or medicines of any kind. Nothing whatsoever out of the way—not even the skeleton.

"I'd heard about that twice, so I asked what had become of it. The sons of the mining engineers, the young demons, had stolen it to celebrate a gringo holiday, which I gathered had been Halloween. They had built an enormous bonfire and the skeleton had fallen in and been consumed. The doctor Miller had been very angry; he had suffered one of his attacks then, almost as bad as the one that gave him death, may the Lord hold him in his kindness. But now it was time for mother to return and feed her brood; her house was mine, and would the señor join in her poor supper?

"The beans were good and the tortillas were wonderful; and the youngest children hadn't ever seen red hair before and had some pointed questions to ask me about mine. And in the middle of the meal something suddenly went *click* in my brain and I knew why Frank Miller had called himself doctor."

Fergus paused and beckoned to a waiter.

Norman said, "Is that all?"

"For the moment. I'm giving you boys a chance to scintillate. There you have all the factors up to that point. All right: *Why* was Miller calling himself doctor?"

"He wasn't practicing," Norman said slowly. "And he wasn't even running a fake medical racket by mail, as people have done from Mexico to avoid the U.S. Post Office Department."

"And," I added, "he hadn't assumed the title to impress people, to attain social standing, because he had nothing to do with his neighbors. And he wasn't carrying on any experiments or research for which he might have needed the title in his writings. So he gained nothing in cash or prestige. All right, what other reason is there for posing as a doctor?"

"Answer," said Fergus leisurely, "he wasn't posing as a doctor. Loo e you might pose as a doctor with no props at all, thinking no one would come in your house but the housekeeper. Or you might stage an elaborate front complete with instrument cabinets and five-pound books. But you wouldn't try it with just one prop—an anatomical skeleton."

Norman and I looked at each other and nodded. It made sense. "Well, then?" I asked.

The fresh drinks came and Fergus said, "My round. . . . Well, then, the skeleton was not a prop for the medical pose. Quite the reverse. Turn it

around and it makes sense. He called himself a doctor *to account for the skeleton.*"

I choked on my first sip and Norman spluttered a little, too. Fergus went on eagerly, with that keen light in his eyes, "You can't hide a skeleton in a tiny house. The housekeeper's bound to see it, and word gets around: Miller liked the Indians, and he liked peace. He had to account for the skeleton. So he became a doctor."

"But that—" Norman objected, "that's no kind of answer. That's just another question."

"I know," said Fergus. "But that's the first step in detection: to find the right question. And that's it: Why does a man live with a skeleton?"

We were silent for a little while. The Top of the Mark was full of glasses and smoke and uniforms; and despite the uniforms it seemed a room set aside that was not part of a world at war—still less, of a world in which a man might live with a skeleton.

"Of course you checked the obvious answer," I said at last.

Fergus nodded. "He couldn't very well have been a black magician, if that's what you mean, or white either. Not a book or a note in the whole place dealing with the subject. No wax, chalk, incense or what-have-you. The skeleton doesn't fit any more into a magical pattern than into a medical one."

"The Dead Beloved?" Norman suggested, hesitantly uttering the phrase in mocking capitals. "Rose-for-Emily stuff? A bit grisly, but not inconceivable."

"The Mexican doctor saw the skeleton. It was a man, and not a young one."

"Then he was planning an insurance fraud—burn the house down and let the bones be found while he vanished."

"A, You don't burn adobe. B, You don't let the skeleton be seen by the doctor who'll examine it later. C, It was a much taller man than Miller."

"A writer?" I ventured wildly. "I've sometimes thought myself a skeleton might be useful in the study—to check where to inflict skull wounds and such."

"With no typewriter, no manuscripts, and very little mail?"

Norman's face lit up. "You said he sketched. Maybe he was working on a modern *Totentanz*—dance-of-death allegory. Holbein and Dürer must have had a skeleton or two around."

"I saw his sketches. Landscapes only."

I lit my pipe and settled back. "All right. We've stooged, and we don't know. Now tell us why a man keeps house with a set of bones." My tone was lighter than necessary.

Fergus said, "I won't go into all the details of my investigations. I saw damned near every adult in Tlitchotl and most of the kids. And I pieced out what I think is the answer. But you ought to be able to gather it from the evidence of four people."



"First, Jim Reilly, mining engineer. Witness deposeth and saith he was on the main street, if you can call it that, of Tlichotl on November Second. He saw Dr. Miller walking along 'like in a kind of nervous haze.' He saw a stranger, 'swarthy but not a Mex,' walk up to Miller and say, 'Frank!' Miller looked up and was astonished. The stranger said, 'Sorry for the delay. But it took me a little time to get here.' And he hadn't finished the sentence before Miller dropped dead. Queried about stranger, witness says he gave his name as Humbert Targ. He stayed around town a few days for the funeral and then left. Said he'd known Miller a long time ago—never quite clear where, but seemingly in the South Seas, as we used to say before we learned to call it the South Pacific. Asked for description, witness proved pretty useless: medium height, medium age, dark complexion. . . . Only helpful details: stranger wore old clothes. 'Shabby?' 'No, just old.' 'Out-of-date?' 'I guess so.' 'How long ago? What kind?' 'I don't know. Just old—funny-looking.' He had only one foot. 'One leg?' 'No, two legs, just one foot.' 'Wooden peg?' 'No, just empty trouser cuff. Walked with a cane.'

"Second witness, Father Gonza—and it's a funny sensation talking to a priest who wears just a plain business suit. He hadn't known Dr. Miller well, though he'd said a mass for his soul. But one night Miller came from the *pulqueria* to the priest's house and insisted on talking to him. He wanted to know how you could ever get right with God and yourself if you'd done someone a great wrong and there was no conceivable way you could make it up to him. The padre asked why, was the injured person dead? Miller hesitated and didn't answer. 'He's alive, then?' 'Oh, no, no!' 'Restitution could surely be made to the next of kin if it were a money matter?' 'No, it's personal.' Father's advice was to pray for the injured party's soul and for grace to avoid such temptation another time. I don't see much what else he could have suggested, but Miller wasn't satisfied."

I wasn't hearing the noise around us any more. Norman was leaning forward, too, and I saw in his eyes that he, too, was beginning to feel the essential *wrongness* of the case that the detective had stumbled on.

"Third witness, the widow Sánchez. She told me some more about the skeleton when I came back for more beans and brought a bottle of red wine to go with them, which it did magnificently. Miller had treasured his skeleton very highly. She was supposed not even to dust it. But once she forgot and dusted it, and a finger came off. This was in October. She thought he might not notice a missing finger, but she knew she'd catch it if he found a loose one; so she burned the bones in the charcoal brazier over which she fried her tortillas. Two days later she was serving the doctor his dinner when she saw a pink caterpillar crawling near his place. She'd never seen a pink caterpillar before. She flicked it away with a napkin, but not before the doctor saw it. He jumped up from the table and ran to look at the skeleton and gave her a terrific bawling-out. After that she saw the caterpillar several times. It was about then that Miller started having these heart attacks. Whenever she saw the caterpillar it was crawling toward the doctor. I looked at her a long time while she finished the wine, and then I said, 'Was it a caterpillar?' She

crossed herself and said, 'No.' She said it very softly and that was all she said that night."

I looked down at the table. My hand lay there and the index finger was tapping gently. We sat in quite a draft, and I shuddered.

"Fourth witness, Timmy Reilly, twelve-year-old son of Jim. He thought it was a great lark that they'd stolen the old boy's bones for Halloween. Fun and games. 'These dopes down here didn't know from nothing about Halloween but him and the gang, they sure showed 'em.' But I could see he was holding something back. I made a swap. He could wear my detective badge (which I've never worn yet) for a whole day if he'd tell me what else he knew. So he showed it to me: the foot that he'd rescued when the skeleton was burned up. He'd tried to grab the bones as they toppled over and all he could reach was the heel. He had the whole foot, well-articulated and lousy with tarsals and stuff. So I made a better deal: he could have the badge for keeps—with the number scratched out a little—if he'd let me burn the foot. He let me."

Fergus paused, and it all began to click into place. The pattern was clear, and it was a pattern that should not be.

"You've got it now?" Fergus said quietly. "All I needed to make it perfect was Norm's story. There had to be such things as *tualalas*, with such powers as theirs. I'd deduced them, but it's satisfying to have them confirmed.

"Miller had an enemy many years ago—a man who had sworn to kill him. And Miller knew a *tualala*, back there in the South Seas. And when he asked himself what would be the best single item to bring back from the future, he knew the answer: *his enemy's skeleton*.

"It wasn't murder. He probably had scruples about that. He sounded like a good enough guy in a way, and maybe his *tualala* asked a more possible price than Norm's. The skeleton was the skeleton that would exist naturally a hundred years from now, no matter how or when the enemy died. But bring that skeleton back here, and the enemy can no longer exist. His skeleton can't be two places at once. You've got the dry dead bones. What becomes of the live ones with flesh on them? You don't know. You don't care. You're safe. You're free to lead the peaceful life you want with Indians and mountain scenery and your sketch pad and your radio. And your skeleton.

"You've got to be careful of that skeleton. If it ceases to exist in this time, the full-fleshed living skeleton might return. You mustn't ever take a chance on the destruction of a little piece. You lose a finger, and a finger returns—a pink thing that crawls, and always toward you.

"Then the skeleton itself is destroyed—all but one foot. You're in mortal terror, but nothing happens. Two days go by, and it's November Second. You know what the Second of November is like in Latin America? It's All Souls Day in the churches, and they call it the *Día de los difuntos*—the Day of the Dead. But it isn't a sad day, outside of church. You go to the cemetery, and it's a picnic. There are skeletons everywhere, same as our Halloween—bright, funny skeletons that never hurt anybody. And there are skulls to wear and skulls to drink out of, and bright white sugar skulls with pink-and-

green trimmings to eat. All along every street are vendors with skulls and skeletons. And there you are in the midst of skeletons, skeletons everywhere, and your skeleton is gone and all your safety with it. And there on the street with all the skulls dipping and bowing at you, you see him and he isn't a skull any more. He's Humbert Targ, only with just one foot and he's explaining that it took a little time to get here.

"Wouldn't you drop dead?" Fergus concluded simply.

My throat felt dry as I asked, "What did you tell the insurance company?"

"Much like Norm's theory. Man was an artist, had an anatomical model, gave out he was a doctor to keep the natives from conniption fits. The prints they sent me fitted what I found in his home and they had to pay the sister. Collected expenses but no bonus."

Norman cleared his throat. "I'm beginning to hope they don't send me back to the island."

"Afraid you might get too tempted by a *tualala*?"

"No. But on the island we really do have pink caterpillars. I'm not sure I could face them."

"There's one thing I still wonder," Fergus said reflectively. "Where was Humbert Targ while his skeleton hung at Miller's side? Or should I say *when* was he? He said, 'It took a little time to get here.' From where? From when? And what kind of time?"

There are some questions you don't even try to answer.



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#### FOR THE DURATION—(Continued from page 57.)

facts to show me I was wrong." Achtmann chuckled. "Don't look so horrified. I'm not another Hare. *He* never admitted he could be mistaken."

"You don't have to," I mumbled. "You have no title . . . the President and Congress front for you, take the blame for your errors and excesses, and you get all the credit for whatever goes right. Oh, yes."

"Ridiculous!" For a moment he was angry. Then he turned his back on me and stared out the window.

As if on some hidden signal, the butler catfooted in and held my coat for me. I stood up, shakily, and began putting it on.

"Don't worry, Professor," said Achtmann in a mild voice. "All right, if you insist, this is a dictatorship. But it's a benevolent one—hell, you know me and what I stand for, don't you? We may have to kill a few here and there, and people in this town are beginning to call me the Cinc, but—" He still didn't face me:

"It's only for the duration of the emergency."

# Alfred Bester

*Once more the master picks up his brush to paint the absolutely unexpected: a crime that mulishly refuses to allow itself to be committed, a time-travel paradox that (crowding Besterian paradox!) blithely contains no paradox, and a mad professor who gets saner and saner as the story gets madder and madder. It's been such a long time between Besters!*

## THE MEN WHO MURDERED MOHAMMED

THERE was a man who mutilated history. He toppled empires and uprooted dynasties. Because of him, Mount Vernon should not be a national shrine, and Columbus, Ohio, should be called Cabot, Ohio. Because of him the name of Marie Curie should be cursed in France, and no one should swear by the beard of the Prophet. Actually, these realities did not happen, because he was a mad professor; or, to put it another way, he only succeeded in making them unreal for himself.

Now the patient reader is too familiar with the conventional mad professor, undersized and over-browed, creating monsters in his laboratory which invariably turn on their maker and menace his lovely daughter. This story isn't about that sort of make-believe man. It's about Henry Hassel, a genuine mad professor in a class with such better known men as Ludwig Boltzmann (See "Ideal Gas Law"), Jacques Charles, and Andre Marie Ampere (1775-1836).

Everyone ought to know that the electrical ampere was so named in honor of Ampere. Ludwig Boltzmann was a distinguished Austrian physicist, as famous for his research on blackbody radiation as Ideal Gases. You can look him up in Volume 3 of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, BALT to BRAI. Jacques Alexandre Cesar Charles was the first mathematician to become interested in flight, and he invented the hydrogen balloon. These were real men.

They were also real mad professors. Ampere, for example, was on his way to an important meeting of scientists in Paris. In his taxi he got a brilliant idea (of an electrical nature, I assume) and whipped out a pencil and jotted the equation on the wall of the hansom cab. Roughly, it was:  $dH = ipdl/r^2$  in which  $p$  is the perpendicular distance from  $P$  to the line of the distant element  $dl$ ; or  $dH = i \sin \theta dl/r^2$ . This is sometimes known as Laplace's Law, although he wasn't at the meeting.

Anyway, the cab arrived at the Academie. Ampere jumped out, paid the driver, and rushed into the meeting to tell everybody about his idea. Then he realized he didn't have the note on him, remembered where he'd left it, and had to chase through the streets of Paris after the taxi to recover his runaway equation. Sometimes I imagine that's how Fermat lost his famous "Last Theorem," although Fermat wasn't at the meeting either, having died some two hundred years earlier.

Or take Boltzmann. Giving a course in Advanced Ideal Gases, he peppered his lectures with involved calculus which he worked out quickly and casually in his head. He had that kind of head. His students had so much trouble trying to puzzle out the math by ear that they couldn't keep up with the lectures, and they begged Boltzmann to work out his equations on the blackboard.

Boltzmann apologized and promised to be more helpful in the future. At the next lecture he began: "Gentlemen, combining Boyle's Law with the Law of Charles, we arrive at the equation  $p v = p_0 v_0 (1 + \alpha t)$ . Now obviously if  $a S^b = f(x) dx \phi(a)$ , then  $p v = RT$  and  $\int S f(x, y, z) dV = 0$ . It's as simple as two plus two equals four." At this point Boltzmann remembered his promise. He turned to the blackboard, conscientiously chalked  $2 + 2 = 4$ , and then breezed on, casually doing the complicated calculus in his head.

Jacques Charles, the brilliant mathematician who discovered Charles' Law (sometimes known as Gay-Lussac's Law) which Boltzmann mentioned in his lecture, had a lunatic passion to become a famous paleographer—that is, a discoverer of ancient manuscripts. I think that being forced to share credit with Gay-Lussac may have unhinged him.

He paid a transparent swindler named Vrain-Lucas 200,000 francs for holograph letters purportedly written by Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, and Pontius Pilate. Charles, a man who could see through any gas, ideal or not, actually believed in these forgeries despite the fact that the maladroit Vrain-Lucas had written them in modern French on modern notepaper bearing modern watermarks. Charles even tried to donate them to the Louvre.

Now these men weren't idiots. They were geniuses who paid a high price for their genius because the rest of their thinking was other-world. A genius is someone who travels to truth by an unexpected path. Unfortunately, unexpected paths lead to disaster in everyday life. This is what happened to Henry Hassel, professor of Applied Compulsion at Unknown University in the year 1980.

Nobody knows where Unknown University is or what they teach there. It has a faculty of some two hundred eccentrics, and a student body of two thousand misfits . . . the kind that remain anonymous until they win Nobel prizes or become The First Man On Mars. You can always spot a graduate of U.U. when you ask people where they went to school. If you get an evasive reply like: "State," or "Oh, a freshwater school you never heard of," you can bet they went to Unknown. Some day I hope to tell you

more about this university which is a center of learning of in the Pickwickian sense.

Anyway, Henry Hassel started home from his office in the Psychotic Pcenter early one afternoon, strolling through the Physical Cluture arcade. It is not true that he did this to leer at the nude coeds practicing Arcane Eurythmics; rather, Hassel liked to admire the trophies displayed in the arcade in memory of great Unknown teams which had won the sort of championships that Unknown teams win . . . in sports like Strabismus, Occlusion and Botulism. (Hassel had been Frambesia singles champion three years running.) He arrived home uplifted, and burst gaily into the house to discover his wife in the arms of a man.

There she was, a lovely woman of thirty-five, with smoky red hair and almond eyes, being heartily embraced by a person whose pockets were stuffed with pamphlets, micro-chemical apparatus and a patella reflex hammer . . . a typical campus character of U.U., in fact. The embrace was so concentrated that neither of the offending parties noticed Hassel glaring at them from the hallway.

Now remember Ampere and Charles and Boltzmann. Hassel weighed one hundred and ninety pounds. He was muscular and uninhibited. It would have been child's play for him to have dismembered his wife and her lover, and thus simply and directly achieve the goal he desired—the end of his wife's life. But Henry Hassel was in the genius class; his mind just didn't operate that way.

Hassel breathed hard, turned and lumbered into his private laboratory like a freight engine. He opened a drawer labelled DUODENUM and removed a .45 caliber revolver. He opened other drawers, more interestingly labelled, and assembled apparatus. In exactly seven and one-half minutes (such was his rage) he put together a time machine (such was his genius).

Professor Hassel assembled the time machine around him, set a dial for 1902, picked up the revolver and pressed a button. The machine made a noise like defective plumbing and Hassel disappeared. He reappeared in Philadelphia on June 3rd, 1902, went directly to No. 1218 Walnut Street, a red brick house with marble steps, and rang the bell. A man who might have passed for the third Smith Brother opened the door and looked at Henry Hassel.

"Mr. Jessup?" Hassel asked in a suffocated voice.

"Yes?"

"You are Mr. Jessup?"

"I am."

"You will have a son, Edgar? Edgar Allan Jessup . . . so named because of your regrettable admiration for Poe?"

The third Smith Brother was startled. "Not that I know of," he said. "I'm not married yet."

"You will be," Hassel said angrily. "I have the misfortune to be married to your son's daughter, Greta. Excuse me." He raised the revolver and shot his wife's grandfather-to-be.

"She will have ceased to exist," Hassel muttered, blowing smoke out of the revolver. "I'll be a bachelor. I may even be married to somebody else. . . . Good God! Who?"

Hassel waited impatiently for the automatic recall of the time machine to snatch him back to his own laboratory. He rushed into his living room. There was his red-headed wife, still in the arms of a man.

Hassel was thunderstruck.

"So that's it," he growled. "A family tradition of faithlessness. Well, we'll see about that. We have ways and means." He permitted himself a hollow laugh, returned to his laboratory, and sent himself back to the year 1901, where he shot and killed Emma Hotchkiss, his wife's maternal grandmother-to-be. He returned to his own home in his own time. There was his red-headed wife, still in the arms of another man.

"But I *know* the old bitch was her grandmother," Hassel muttered. "You couldn't miss the resemblance. What the hell's gone wrong?"

Hassel was confused and dismayed, but not without resources. He went to his study, had difficulty picking up the phone, but finally managed to dial the Malpractice Laboratory. His finger kept oozing out of the dial holes.

"Sam?" he said. "This is Henry."

"Who?"

"Henry."

"You'll have to speak up."

"Henry Hassel!"

"Oh, good afternoon, Henry."

"Tell me all about time."

"Time? Hmmm . . ." The Simplex And Multiplex Computer cleared its throat while it waited for the data circuits to link up. "Ahem. Time. (1) Absolute. (2) Relative. (3) Recurrent. (1) Absolute: period, contingent, duration, diurnity, perpetuity—"

"Sorry, Sam. Wrong request. Go back. I want time, reference to succession of, travel in."

Sam shifted gears and began again. Hassel listened intently. He nodded. He grunted. "Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Right. I see. Thought so. A continuum, eh? Acts performed in past must alter future. Then I'm on the right track. But act must be significant, eh? Mass-action effect. Trivia cannot divert existing phenomena streams. Hmmm. But how trivial is a grandmother?"

"What are you trying to do, Henry?"

"Kill my wife," Hassel snapped. He hung up. He returned to his laboratory. He considered, still in a jealous rage,

"Got to do something significant," he muttered. "Wipe Greta out. Wipe it all out. All right, by God! I'll show 'em."

Hassel went back to the year 1775, visited a Virginia farm and shot a young colonel in the brisket. The colonel's name was George Washington, and Hassel made sure he was dead. He returned to his own time and his own home. There was his red-headed wife, still in the arms of another.

"Damn!" said Hassel. He was running out of ammunition. He opened

a fresh box of cartridges, went back in time and massacred Christopher Columbus, Napoleon, Mohammed, and half a dozen other celebrities. "That ought to do it, by God!" said Hassel.

He returned to his own time, and found his wife as before.

His knees turned to water; his feet seemed to melt into the floor. He went back to his laboratory, walking through nightmare quicksands.

"What the hell is significant?" Hassel asked himself painfully. "How much does it take to change futurity? By God, I'll really change it this time. I'll go for broke."

He traveled to Paris at the turn of the 20th century and visited a Madame Curie in an attic workshop near the Sorbonne. "Madame," he said in his execrable French, "I am a stranger to you of the utmost, but a scientist entire. Knowing of your experiments with radium—Oh? You haven't got to radium yet? No matter. I am here to teach you all of nuclear fission."

He taught her. He had the satisfaction of seeing Paris go up in a mushroom of smoke before the automatic recall brought him home. "That'll teach women to be faithless," he growled. . . . "Guhhhh!" The last was wrenched from his lips when he saw his red-headed wife still— But no need to belabor the obvious.

Hassel swam through fogs to his study and sat down to think. While he's thinking I'd better warn you that this is not a conventional time story. If you imagine for a moment that Henry is going to discover that the man fondling his wife is himself, you're mistaken. The viper is not Henry Hassel, his son, a relation, or even Ludwig Boltzmann (1844–1906). Hassel does not make a circle in time, ending where the story begins, to the satisfaction of nobody and the fury of everybody . . . for the simple reason that time isn't circular, or linear, or tandem, discoid, syzygous, longinquitous, or pancicularted. Time is a private matter, as Hassel discovered.

"Maybe I slipped up somehow," Hassel muttered. "I'd better find out." He fought with the telephone, which seemed to weigh a hundred tons, and at last managed to get through to the library.

"Hello, library? This is Henry."

"Who?"

"Henry Hassel."

"Speak up, please."

"HENRY HASSEL!"

"Oh. Good afternoon, Henry."

"What have you got on George Washington?"

Library clucked while her scanners sorted through her catalogues. "George Washington, first president of the United States, was born in—"

"First president? Wasn't he murdered in 1775?"

"Really, Henry. That's an absurd question. Everybody knows that George Wash—"

"Doesn't anybody know he was shot?"

"By whom?"

"Me."



"When?"

"In 1775."

"How did you manage to do that?"

"I've got a revolver."

"No, I mean, how did you do it two hundred years ago?"

"I've got a time machine."

"Well, there's no record here," Library said. "He's still doing fine in my files. You must have missed."

"I did not miss. What about Christopher Columbus? Any record of his death in 1489?"

"But he discovered the New World in 1492."

"He did not. He was murdered in 1489."

"How?"

"With a .45 slug in the gizzard."

"You again, Henry?"

"Yes."

"There's no record here," Library insisted. "You must be one lousy shot."

"I will not lose my temper," Hassel said in a trembling voice.

"Why not, Henry?"

"Because it's lost already," he shouted. "All right! What about Marie Curie? Did she or did she not discover the fission bomb which destroyed Paris at the turn of the century?"

"She did not. Enrico Fermi—"

"She did."

"She didn't."

"I personally taught her. Me. Henry Hassel."

"Everybody says you're a wonderful theoretician, but a lousy teacher, Henry. You—"

"Go to hell, you old biddy. This has got to be explained."

"Why?"

"I forget. There was something on my mind, but it doesn't matter, now. What would you suggest?"

"You really have a time machine?"

"Of course I've got a time machine."

"Then go back and check."

Hassel returned to the year 1775, visited Mount Vernon, and interrupted the spring planting. "Excuse me, Colonel," he began.

The big man looked at him curiously. "You talk funny, stranger," he said. "Where are you from?"

"Oh, a freshwater school you never heard of."

"You look funny, too. Kind of misty, so to speak."

"Tell me, Colonel, what do you hear from Christopher Columbus?"

"Not much," Colonel Washington answered. "Been dead two-three hundred years."

"When did he die?"

"Year Fifteen Hundred some-odd, near as I remember."

"He did not. He died in 1489."

"Got your dates wrong, friend. He discovered America in 1492."

"Cabot discovered America. Sebastian Cabot."

"Nope. Cabot came a mite later."

"I have infallible proof!" Hassel began, but broke off as a stocky and rather stout man with a face ludicrously reddened by rage, approached. He was wearing baggy grey slacks and a tweed jacket two sizes too small for him. He was carrying a .45 revolver. It was only after he had stared for a moment that Henry Hassel realized that he was looking at himself and not relishing the sight.

"My God!" Hassel murmured, "it's me, coming back to murder Washington that first time. If I'd made this second trip an hour later, I'd have found Washington dead. Hey!" he called. "Not yet. Hold off a minute. I've got to straighten something out, first."

Hassel paid no attention to himself; indeed, he did not appear to be aware of himself. He marched straight up to Colonel Washington and shot him in the gizzard. Colonel Washington collapsed, emphatically dead. The first murderer inspected the body, and then, ignoring Hassel's attempt to stop him and engage him in dispute, turned and marched off, muttering venomously to himself.

"He didn't hear me," Hassel wondered. "He didn't even feel me. And why don't I remember myself trying to stop me the first time I shot the colonel? What the hell is going on?"

Considerably disturbed, Henry Hassel visited Chicago and dropped into the Chicago University squash courts in the early 1940s. There, in a slippery mess of graphite bricks and graphite dust that coated him, he located an Italian scientist named Fermi.

"Repeating Marie Curie's work, I see, *Dottore?*" Hassel said.

Fermi glanced about as though he had heard a faint sound.

"Repeating Marie Curie's work, *Dottore?*" Hassel roared.

Fermi looked at him strangely. "Where you from, *amico?*"

"State."

"State Department?"

"Just State. It's true, isn't it, *Dottore*, that Marie Curie discovered nuclear fission back in nineteen ought-ought?"

"No! No! No!" Fermi cried. "We are the first, and we are not there yet. Police! Police! Spy!"

"This time I'll go on record," Hassel growled. He pulled out his trusty .45, emptied it into Doctor Fermi's chest, and awaited arrest and immolation in newspaper files. To his amazement, Dr. Fermi did not collapse. Dr. Fermi merely explored his chest tenderly and, to the men who answered his cry, said: "It is nothing. I felt in my within a sudden sensation of burn which may be a neuralgia of the cardiac nerve, but is most likely gas."

Hassel was too agitated to wait for the automatic recall of the time machine. Instead he returned at once to Unknown University under his own power. This should have given him a clue, but he was too possessed to notice.

It was at this time that I (1913-1975) first saw him . . . a dim figure tramping through parked cars, closed doors and brick walls, with the light of lunatic determination on his face.

He oozed into the library, prepared for an exhaustive discussion, but could not make himself felt or heard by the catalogues. He went to the Malpractice Laboratory where Sam, the Simplex And Multiplex Computer, has installations sensitive up to 10,700 angstroms. Sam could not see Henry, but managed to hear him through a sort of wave-interference phenomenon.

"Sam," Hassel said, "I've made one hell of a discovery."

"You're always making discoveries, Henry," Sam complained. "Your data allocation is filled. Do I have to start another tape for you?"

"But I need advice. Who's the leading authority on time, reference to succession of, travel in?"

"That would be Israel Lennox, spatial mechanics, professor of, Yale."

"How do I get in touch with him?"

"You don't, Henry. He's dead. Died in '75."

"What authority have you got on time, travel in, living?"

"Wiley Murphy."

"Murphy? From our own Trauma Department? That's a break. Where is he now?"

"As a matter of fact, Henry, he went over to your house to ask you something."

Hassel went home without walking, searched through his laboratory and study without finding anyone, and at last floated into the living room where his red-headed wife was still in the arms of another man. (All this, you understand, had taken place within the space of a few moments after the construction of the time machine . . . such is the nature of time and time travel.) Hassel cleared his throat once or twice and tried to tap his wife on the shoulder. His fingers went through her.

"Excuse me, darling," he said. "Has Wiley Murphy been in to see me?"

Then he looked closer and saw that the man embracing his wife was Murphy himself.

"Murphy!" Hassel exclaimed. "The very man I'm looking for. I've had the most extraordinary experience." Hassel at once launched into a lucid description of his extraordinary experience which went something like this: "Murphy,  $u - v = (u^{\frac{1}{2}} - v^{\frac{1}{2}})(u^{\frac{1}{2}} + u^{\frac{1}{2}}v^{\frac{1}{2}} + v^{\frac{1}{2}})$  but when George Washington  $F(x)y^2\delta x$  and Enrico Fermi  $F(u^{\frac{1}{2}})dxdt$  one-half of Marie Curie, then what about Christopher Columbus times the square root of minus one?"

Murphy ignored Hassel, as did Mrs. Hassel. I jotted down Hassel's equations on the hood of a passing taxi.

"Do listen to me, Murphy," Hassel said. "Greta, dear, would you mind leaving us for a moment? I— For heaven's sake, will you two stop that nonsense? This is serious."

Hassel tried to separate the couple. He could no more touch them than make them hear him. His face turned red again and he became quite choleric

as he beat at Mrs. Hassel and Murphy. It was like beating an Ideal Gas. I thought it best to interfere.

"Hassel!"

"Who's that?"

"Come outside a moment. I want to talk to you."

He shot through the wall. "Where are you?"

"Over here."

"You're sort of dim."

"So are you."

"Who are you?"

"My name's Lennox. Israel Lennox."

"Israel Lennox, spatial mechanics, professor of, Yale?"

"The same."

"But you died in '75."

"I disappeared in '75."

"What d'you mean?"

"I invented a time machine."

"By God! So did I," Hassel said. "This afternoon. The idea came to me in a flash . . . I don't know why . . . and I've had the most extraordinary experience, Lennox, time is not a continuum."

"No?"

"It's a series of discrete particles . . . like pearls on a string."

"Yes?"

"Each pearl is a 'Now.' Each 'Now' has its own past and future. But none of them relate to any others. You see? If  $a = a_1 + a_2j + \dots + a_nx(b_1)$ —"

"Never mind the mathematics, Henry."

"It's a form of quantum transfer of energy. Time is emitted in discrete corpuscles or quanta. We can visit each individual quantum and make changes within it, but no change in any one corpuscle affects any other corpuscle. Right?"

"Wrong," I said sorrowfully.

"What d'you mean, 'wrong?'" he said, angrily gesturing through the cleavage of a passing coed. "You take the trochoid equations and—"

"Wrong," I repeated firmly. "Will you listen to me, Israel?"

"Oh, go ahead," he said.

"Have you noticed that you've become rather insubstantial? Dim? Spectral? Space and time no longer affect you."

"Yes?"

"Henry, I had the misfortune to construct a time machine back in '75."

"So you said. Listen, what about power input? I figure I'm using about 7.3 kilowatts per—"

"Never mind the power input, Henry. On my first trip into the past, I visited the Pleistocene. I was eager to photograph the mastodon, the giant ground sloth, and the saber-tooth tiger. While I was backing up to get a mastodon fully in the field of view at  $f/6.3$  at  $1/100$ th of a second, or on the LVS scale—"

"Never mind the LVS scale," he said.

"While I was backing up, I inadvertently trampled and killed a small Pleistocene insect."

"Ah-ha!" said Hassel.

"I was terrified by the incident. I had visions of returning to my world to find it completely changed as a result of this single death. Imagine my surprise when I returned to my world to find that nothing had changed."

"Oh-ho!" said Hassel.

"I became curious. I went back to the Pleistocene and killed the mastodon. Nothing was changed in 1975. I returned to the Pleistocene and slaughtered the wild life . . . still with no effect. I ranged through time, killing and destroying, in an attempt to alter the present."

"Then you did it just like me," Hassel exclaimed. "Odd we didn't run into each other."

"Not odd at all."

"I got Columbus."

"I got Marco Polo."

"I got Napoleon."

"I thought Einstein was more important."

"Mohammed didn't change things much—I expected more from *him*."

"I know. I got him, too."

"What do you mean, you got him too?" Hassel demanded.

"I killed him September 16th 599. Old Style."

"Why I got Mohammed January 5th, 598."

"I believe you."

"But how could you have killed him after I killed him?"

"We both killed him."

"That's impossible."

"My boy," I said, "time is entirely subjective. It's a private matter . . . a personal experience. There is no such thing as objective time, just as there is no such thing as objective love, or an objective soul."

"Do you mean to say that time travel is impossible? But we've done it."

"To be sure, and many others, for all I know. But we each travel into our own past, and no other person's. There is no universal continuum, Henry. There are only billions of individuals, each with his own continuum; and one continuum cannot affect the other. We're like millions of strands of spaghetti in the same pot. No time traveller can ever meet another time traveller in the past or future. Each of us must travel up and down his own strand alone."

"But we're meeting each other now."

"We're no longer time-travellers, Henry. We've become the spaghetti sauce."

"Spaghetti sauce?"

"Yes. You and I can visit any strand we like, because we've destroyed ourselves."

"I don't understand."

(Continued on page 111.)

# Miriam Allen de Ford...

*... has written many admirable science-fiction tales but is perhaps better known as an author of unconventional murder stories. Here is one of them, so unconventional as to be more suited to these pages than to, say, Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine ...*

## Timequake

AT 8:04½ p.m. on Monday, April 16, 1979, there was a sudden timequake affecting all the Solar System. A fault in the space-time continuum, an old warp that had existed for billennia, abruptly slipped, and it instantly became 8:04½ a.m. again that same day in every time zone, with everything just as it had been that morning.

Business deals consummated after months of endeavor had to be accomplished all over again. Men sinking into death resumed the painful breathing that had ceased at last. Women fresh from the agony of giving birth were back where they had started twelve hours before. Brides re-became virgins—if such they had been at their weddings. Convicted criminals who had heard themselves sentenced had again to face that ordeal, knowing in advance what it would be. Children had before them another spring day of happy play, or of school problems, or of boredom. People knew beforehand that that day they had broken their legs, or lost their wallets, or proposed marriage and been turned down, or received news of an unexpected legacy.

And young Terry Falconer, who at eight o'clock that evening had been running from the memory of the crushed, bloody body of the man he had killed, was not yet a murderer.

So many strange things had happened in the world by 1979 that nearly everybody took the timequake in stride, once it was hastily explained over all mass communication media by an international committee of scientists immediately alerted by the U.N. The inevitable had only to be stoically endured, ameliorated as best could be by scientific assistance: the exhausted new mother had to brace herself for another season of pain, as suddenly the

baby she had seen for a moment became again unborn and her labor began—at least she knew now that it was healthy and perfect, and whether she had a son or a daughter. The dying perhaps knew, the first of all human beings, what it means to die; but for the most part they were already too near death to be able to think clearly or to communicate at all. The criminal knew how long he must serve; the bride what the consummation she had dreamed off would be—or perhaps the criminal could hope for a desperate escape, the bride could change her mind.

For the crux of the whole unprecedented situation, of course, was whether this second April 16 must be merely a repetition of the first one, or whether the past could be changed in the new present. If a law had been passed on that first April 16, for example, could a violator of it on the second April 16 be punished, or must the law be re-enacted? What of contracts signed between management and labor? What of political treaties and agreements? What of business and professional deals, down even to the keeping of appointments?

Very quickly, from the mere fact of deciding to have eggs instead of cereal for breakfast on that second Monday morning, or of catching instead of missing a bus, or of buying a green hat instead of a vanished red one, it became apparent that this was truly a new twelve hours, as different and unique as the one had been which now was no more. It was years before tangled issues arising from the timequake reached the highest tribunals. Some disputes, from their very nature, never could be adjudicated. But the consensus was that the present is Now, and that every present supersedes every past.

What that meant to Terry Falconer, on the second April 16, was that now he must not rush in fury to find Otto Raff, accuse him of an intolerable injury, and then in sudden unconquerable rage catch up the nearest golf club—it was on the links that he had found his employer, late on that first Monday afternoon—and beat the older man until he lay still and broken. Now he knew what it meant to be a murderer. Now he could summon the self-control to confront Raff and have it out with him reasonably, man to man.

When, cowering in his old 1977 car, in the dark on the edge of the airport, waiting for a plane to carry him out of at least immediate reach of the law, Falconer incredulously saw night in an instant become day, his first reaction (it was that of many) was to think that despite his terror and confusion he had somehow fallen asleep, and that it was the next morning. Tuning in his car TV to find if there were news of the murder or of his flight, he heard instead the astounding pronouncement of the committee of scientists.

More than most who heard, Terry Falconer was predisposed to accept at once this extraordinary statement: he *needed* a miracle. He turned the car and drove back through byways to the city. At a newsstand in a quiet side street he bought a morning paper. It was dated "Monday, April 16, 1979," just as "yesterday's" had been; and in enormous headlines it confirmed what his ears had just heard. He was (together with others who might have committed murder on that superseded day) the first killer in the history of

mankind to have been given another chance. Soberly he drove back to the house from which he had fled so precipitantly. Everything was in the disorder in which he had left it. Eve was not there.

That first Monday morning had certainly included no drive home from the airport. Falconer needed no further assurance to be certain that the twelve hours which had slipped into the warp of time were really canceled. But since he, and presumably everybody else, could remember the events of those hours only too clearly, the cancellation must be objective only, not subjective. He had yet to cope with Otto Raff, restored from the dead.

Falconer arrived at the office at 9:00 as usual. Raff, the president of the company, never turned up until 9:30. In Terry Falconer's desk drawer was locked the file from which all this evil had sprung. He got it out and read it again. The latter by plain implication accused him of compounding a felony.

He was watching, but Raff must have come in by his private door. Terry's intercom squawked and a secretarial voice said Mr. Falconer was wanted in Mr. Raff's office. Terry braced his shoulders. The whole office was at sixes and sevens, trying to get things straightened out from "yesterday's" activities; nobody noticed as he went, feeling cold around the mouth and with flutters in his stomach, through Raff's anteroom into the big office.

What do you say to a man you murdered?

"Well, Terry," Raff greeted him. There was a long silence.

Falconer forced his eyes up from tracing the pattern of the rug. Raff was perfectly calm, even amiable. But his right hand lay on the desk—and in it was a revolver.

"Tell me what happened," he went on in his quiet voice. "And tell me why."

Falconer had to clear his throat twice before he could speak.

"What do you remember?" he croaked.

"You killed me, didn't you? All right, I'll tell you what I can remember of it. You came up to me while I was playing over the course alone. I thought something had happened, here or at home, your eyes were so wild. You began blurting out something I couldn't even understand. I said, 'Wait a minute, Terry. What's wrong?' Then all I remember is seeing you grab one of my clubs. Before I could move, it crashed against my head. That's the end—I blacked out right away. Did I die?"

"Not then," said Falconer in a low voice. "I kept on till you did."

"By an incredible chance, it's as if it never was. And you won't do it again—I've seen to that." He raised the gun slightly.

"I wouldn't, anyway."

"What's it all about?"

"It was the Mohler file. I had to go through it for something in Mohler's claim, and I found—I found—"

"You found a copy of the letter I wrote Mohler on the third. That was my error. I should have kept it out of the file. But did you *believe* it?"

"Why not?"

"I should have told you beforehand. But it was so obvious—it never



occurred to me you wouldn't know what it meant, if you ever happened to run across it. As a matter of fact, I never expected you to have that file at all—it was McKenzie's case, and I didn't know he'd turned it over to you when he was laid up. He knew all about it; in fact, we cooked it up between us."

Falconer reddened.

"Then he . . . knows about me too?"

"My dear boy, everybody on that level 'knows about' you, as you put it. Nobody cares. I couldn't take you on without telling the others to whom you're responsible. The bonding company insisted on it, for one thing."

"So I came in handy when you needed a fall guy, is that it?"

The revolver wiggled again.

"Self-discipline, Terry! Mohler is making a false claim against the company—we know it and he knows we know it, but we can't prove it and he knows that too. He wouldn't dare bring it to court, but he thought he could bluff us. I decided to fight fire with fire—our lie against his lie. Yes, if you want to think of it that way, you were the only man against whom we could make the accusation with some show of likelihood. The thing would be safe with him, he'd never make it public, for his own sake. He knew it wasn't true, that you never were his accomplice, but he couldn't say so, or make any fuss about it, for fear of exposing his own cheating. It worked; two days ago I got a letter from him, withdrawing his claim. The whole thing's over."

"With me as the goat tethered for the tiger to eat so you could shoot it."

Raff smiled placatingly.

"I don't blame you for being sore, Terry. I grant I made a mistake in not getting your permission first. I guess I must have felt unconsciously that you'd understand. After all, you know you're innocent, that the accusation was untrue and I must have had a reason for making it. And why in heaven's name should you think I was purposely framing you? Your dad and I were good friends as long as he lived, Terry, you know that. I took you into the business when most people wouldn't, after that . . . episode when you were just a crazy kid. Why should I suddenly turn on you now?"

The word burst out of Falconer.

"Evel"

"Eve?" Otto Raff looked bewildered. "What on earth has she to do with it? I presume you've told her all your past history long ago—haven't you?" Terry nodded. "Then how could my little maneuver with that crook Mohler affect your wife?"

"Oh-oh, I see." Raff whistled ruefully. "I did goof, didn't I? I was stupid. It never entered my head that you could take the thing seriously. I suppose you even imagine I was intending to have you sent to prison, away from her."

"Back to prison," said Falconer bitterly. "So that I'd be out of the way, and give you and Eve—"

The older man gazed at him in blank amazement.

"I—Eve—what in God's name are you driving at? Do you imagine—could you possibly imagine—" He laughed. "I don't want to hurt your

feelings, my boy—Eve's a charming girl, as sweet as she's pretty. But good heavens, to me she's just a child. You two are like my own children. How on earth could it have entered your silly, jealous mind that I'd be interested—that way, in Eve? Thank you, I prefer my women to be of my own generation!"

He opened a drawer of the desk and laid the revolver in it. He looked at Terry Falconer quietly, an expression of mingled amusement and chagrin on his face.

"How melodramatic, Terry! Now I'm supposed to be in love with your wife, is that it? And so, though I've been about the best friend you ever had, though I took you into my own business after you'd served time as a boy—not, I grant, for theft; I could never have put that over on the bonding company; just for assault (that dreadful temper of yours again)—though I've given you every boost up the ladder, was as happy over your marriage as if I'd been your own father, looked forward to the day when you'd be really grown up emotionally, the day when I could confidently think of passing on the whole business to you when I was through with it . . . after all that you could still believe that I was deliberately framing you, so as to get rid of you and carry on some imaginary affair with Eve!

"Terry, Terry! I was a fool, I admit, not to talk to you before I wrote that letter to Mohler. I should have done it; it wasn't fair to you. But that you should jump to such a horrible conclusion—that you should let yourself get again into such an insane rage, and rush off to murder me, your old friend, your benefactor! Terry, it's hard to take in.

"This impossible thing that happened last night—this timequake, the scientist fellows call it—if it hadn't been for that I'd be dead now, and you'd be a hunted criminal, and Eve a murderer's wife. Terry, it makes me feel . . . religious. How does it make you feel?"

"Ashamed," Falconer whispered.

Raff got to his feet, walked around the desk, and put his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"You've had something nobody ever had before in the history of the world, Terry," he said. "We've all had it—everybody alive today. Another chance: a chance to make up for our mistakes. Don't be ashamed—just be everlastingly grateful.

"And now, like millions of other people, let's pretend yesterday or whatever you want to call it didn't happen. We won't forget it, either of us; we can't. But we can learn our lessons and go on from there. I'll learn not to be so smart and not to involve other people in a scheme unless I have their consent first: that was my offense. And you, my boy, you'll learn again, and for good this time, that lack of self-control inevitably leads to disaster. I have a hunch that from now on that low threshold of anger in your make-up is going to be a lot higher than it has been in the past. Next time, you'll be able to ask for an explanation before you thrash out blindly. Am I right?"

Falconer nodded, unable to speak.

"Go on home now, Terry. I'm going to close the whole office for the rest

of the day; everybody's too upset to work, and everybody has private problems to settle because of this unbelievable time performance. So clean up your desk and beat it. You'll probably find Eve's office has sent her home too.

"And if you want my advice, keep your mouth shut to her about this whole affair. It would only make her unhappy, and it's all over. Unless—how much *does* she know?"

"Nothing. When I went home after—when I went home afterward she wasn't back yet, and this morning she'd left before I got there. I just packed some things and got in the car and beat it. I was trying to get away before—before they found out. I was at the airport, waiting for a plane, when the timequake happened. Of course, she must know I was out all night, and that the car was gone."

"Tell her I sent you on a sudden trip and that you forgot to leave a note for her—you've made plenty of quick trips for us that way in the past."

"All right. And—and I can't tell you—"

"Don't try. So far as I'm concerned nothing ever happened—as long as I'm alive and well today."

Terry Falconer gripped Otto Raff's hand hard, struggling to keep down the lump that rose in his throat. He turned and hurried from the office. In half an hour he would be safe home with Eve: Eve, who was his as he was hers; Eve, to whom a lifetime of devotion would not make up for the suspicions that had tortured him ever since the jealous pang when he had surprised a look of affection between his wife and Otto Raff, and built up from it the monstrous structure that only a miracle of nature had preserved from being fatal to all three of them.

Alone again in his office, Raff called his secretary and told her to serve notice that the employees might all leave for the remainder of the day. Then he put on his hat and left by the private door. Downstairs he went at once to a phone booth and dialed a number.

"Eve?" he said into the receiver. "It's all right, darling, everything's fixed up."

"Now don't be upset—it didn't happen; yesterday didn't exist. He's on his way home now—I let everybody go. I knew you'd be there; I checked with your Mr. Ellins as soon as I came in. He'll have some story to tell you about where he was when the timequake happened—just pretend to believe it. Don't cry, sweetie—just be my brave girl and get through today, and everything will be perfectly all right. Sure I'll be careful—I'll be protected from now on. Don't worry; I've got him calmed down like a lamb."

"In a way it's a good thing it happened as it did. I've got things fixed now so that it will work out a lot better than the other way that failed. I had it coming to me—you warned me to take that letter out of the file, but I just plain forgot. But nothing like that will be necessary any more."

"Yes, of course I do, darling. And you? . . . Bless you, sweet child, you make me feel young again!"

(Continued on page 112.)

Roger Zelazny's

a rose  
for  
Ecclesiastes

*a newcomer to the SF ranks, Roger Zelazny makes an impressive debut here, with a story of a Mars 'where the sun is a tarnished penny . . . the wind is a whip and two moons play at hotrod games.'*

I

I WAS busy translating one of my *Madrigals Macabre* into Martian on the morning I was found acceptable. The intercom had buzzed briefly, and I dropped my pencil and flipped on the toggle in a single motion.

"Mister G," piped Morton's youthful contralto, "the old man says I should 'get hold of that damned conceited rhymers' right away, and send him to his cabin.—Since there's only one damned conceited rhymers . . ."

"Let not ambition mock thy useful toil." I cut him off.

So, the Martians had finally made up their minds! I knocked an inch and



a half of ash from a smouldering butt, and took my first drag since I had lit it. The entire month's anticipation tried hard to crowd itself into the moment, but could not quite make it. I was frightened to walk those forty feet and hear Emory say the words I already knew he would say; and that feeling elbowed the other one into the background.

So I finished the stanza I was translating before I got up.

It took only a moment to reach Emory's door. I knocked twice and opened it, just as he growled, "Come in."

"You wanted to see me?" I sat down quickly to save him the trouble of offering me a seat.

"That was fast. What did you do, run?"

I regarded his paternal discontent:

*Little fatty flecks beneath pale eyes, thinning hair, and an Irish nose; a voice a decibel louder than anyone else's . . .*

Hamlet to Claudius: "I was working."

"Hah!" he snorted. "Come off it. No one's ever seen you do any of that stuff."

I shrugged my shoulders and started to rise.

"If that's what you called me down here—"

"Sit down!"

He stood up. He walked around his desk. He hovered above me and glared down. (A hard trick, even when I'm in a low chair.)

"You are undoubtedly the most antagonistic bastard I've ever had to work with!" he bellowed, like a belly-stung buffalo. "Why the hell don't you act like a human being sometime and surprise everybody? I'm willing to admit you're smart, maybe even a genius, but—oh, Hell!" He made a heaving gesture with both hands and walked back to his chair.

"Betty has finally talked them into letting you go in." His voice was normal again. "They'll receive you this afternoon. Draw one of the jeepsters after lunch, and get down there."

"Okay," I said.

"That's all, then."

I nodded, got to my feet. My hand was on the doorknob when he said:

"I don't have to tell you how important this is. Don't treat them the way you treat us."

I closed the door behind me.

I don't remember what I had for lunch. I was nervous, but I knew instinctively that I wouldn't muff it. My Boston publishers expected a Martian Idyll, or at least a Saint-Exupéry job on space flight. The National Science Association wanted a complete report on the Rise and Fall of the Martian Empire.

They would both be pleased. I knew.

That's the reason everyone is jealous—why they hate me. I always come through, and I can come through better than anyone else.

I shovelled in a final anthill of slop, and made my way to our car barn. I drew one jeepster and headed it toward Tirellian.

Flames of sand, lousy with iron oxide, set fire to the buggy. They swarmed over the open top and bit through my scarf; they set to work pitting my goggles.

The jeepster, swaying and panting like a little donkey I once rode through the Himalayas, kept kicking me in the seat of the pants. The Mountains of Tirellian shuffled their feet and moved toward me at a cockeyed angle.

Suddenly I was heading uphill, and I shifted gears to accommodate the engine's braying. Not like Gobi, not like the Great Southwestern Desert, I mused. Just red, just dead . . . without even a cactus.

I reached the crest of the hill, but I had raised too much dust to see what was ahead. It didn't matter, though, I have a head full of maps. I bore to the left and downhill, adjusting the throttle. A cross-wind and solid ground beat down the fires. I felt like Ulysses in Malebolge—with a terza-rima speech in one hand and an eye out for Dante.

I sounded a rock pagoda and arrived.

Betty waved as I crunched to a halt, then jumped down.

"Hi," I choked, unwinding my scarf and shaking out a pound and a half of grit. "Like, where do I go and who do I see?"

She permitted herself a brief Germanic giggle—more at my starting a sentence with "like" than at my discomfort—then she started talking. (She is a top linguist, so a word from the Village Idiom still tickles her!)

I appreciate her precise, furry talk; informational, and all that. I had enough in the way of social pleasantries before me to last at least the rest of my life. I looked at her chocolate-bar eyes and perfect teeth, at her sun-bleached hair, close-cropped to the head (I hate blondes!), and decided that she was in love with me.

"Mr. Gallinger, the Matriarch is waiting inside to be introduced. She has consented to open the Temple records for your study." She paused here to pat her hair and squirm a little. Did my gaze make her nervous?

"They are religious documents, as well as their only history," she continued, "sort of like the Mahabharata. She expects you to observe certain rituals in handling them, like repeating the sacred words when you turn pages—she will teach you the system."

I nodded quickly, several times.

"Fine, let's go in."

"Uh—" she paused. "Do not forget their Eleven Forms of Politeness and Degree. They take matters of form quite seriously—and do not get into any discussions over the equality of the sexes—"

"I know all about their taboos," I broke in. "Don't worry. I've lived in the Orient, remember?"

She dropped her eyes and seized my hand. I almost jerked it away.

"It will look better if I enter leading you."

I swallowed my comments and followed her, like Samson in Gaza.

Inside, my last thought met with a strange correspondence. The Matriarch's quarters were a rather abstract version of what I imagine the tents of the tribes of Israel to have been like. Abstract, I say, because it was all frescoed brick, peaked like a huge tent, with animal-skin representations like gray-blue scars, that looked as if they had been laid on the walls with a palette knife.

The Matriarch, M'Cwyie, was short, white-haired, fifty-ish, and dressed like a Gipsy queen. With her rainbow of voluminous skirts she looked like an inverted punch bowl set atop a cushion.

Accepting my obeisances, she regarded me as an owl might a rabbit. The lids of those black, black eyes jumped upward as she discovered my perfect accent.—The tape recorder Betty had carried on her interviews had done its part, and I knew the language reports from the first two expeditions, verbatim. I'm all hell when it comes to picking up accents.

"You are the poet?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Recite one of your poems, please."

"I'm sorry, but nothing short of a thorough translating job would do justice to your language and my poetry, and I don't know enough of your language yet."

"Oh?"

"But I've been making such translations for my own amusement, as an exercise in grammar," I continued. "I'd be honored to bring a few of them along one of the times that I come here."

"Yes. Do so."

Score one for me!

She turned to Betty.

"You may go now."

Betty muttered the parting formalities, gave me a strange sidewise look, and was gone. She apparently had expected to stay and "assist" me. She wanted a piece of the glory, like everyone else. But I was the Schliemann at this Troy, and there would be only one name on the Association report!

M'Cwyie rose, and I noticed that she gained very little height by standing. But then I'm six-six and look like a poplar in October: thin, bright red on top, and towering above everyone else.

"Our records are very, very old," she began. "Betty says that your word for their age is 'millennia'."

I nodded appreciatively.

"I'm very eager to see them."

"They are not here. We will have to go into the Temple—they may not be removed."

I was suddenly wary.

"You have no objections to my copying them, do you?"

"No. I see that you respect them, or your desire would not be so great."

"Excellent."

She seemed amused. I asked her what was funny.

"The High Tongue may not be so easy for a foreigner to learn."

It came through fast.

No one on the first expedition had gotten this close. I had had no way of knowing that this was a double-language deal—a classical as well as a vulgar. I knew some of their Prakrit, now I had to learn all their Sanskrit.

"Ouch! and damn!"

"Pardon, please?"

"It's non-translatable, M'Cwyie. But imagine yourself having to learn the High Tongue in a hurry, and you can guess at the sentiment."

She seemed amused again, and told me to remove my shoes.

She guided me through an alcove . . .

. . . and into a burst of Byzantine brilliance!

No Earthman had ever been in this room before, or I would have heard about it. Carter, the first expedition's linguist, with the help of one Mary



Allen, M.D., had learned all the grammar and vocabulary that I knew while sitting cross-legged in the ante-chamber.

We had had no idea this existed. Greedily, I cast my eyes about. A highly sophisticated system of esthetics lay behind the décor. We would have to revise our entire estimation of Martian culture.

For one thing, the ceiling was vaulted and corbelled; for another, there were side-columns with reverse flutings; for another—oh hell! The place was big. Posh. You could never have guessed it from the shaggy outsiders.

I bent forward to study the gilt filigree on a ceremonial table. M'Cwyie seemed a little smug at my intentness, but I'd still have hated to play poker with her.

The table was loaded with books.

With my toe, I traced a mosaic on the floor.

"Is your entire city within this one building?"

"Yes, it goes far back into the mountain."

"I see," I said, seeing nothing.

I couldn't ask her for a conducted tour, yet.

She moved to a small stool by the table.

"Shall we begin your friendship with the High Tongue?"

I was trying to photograph the hall with my eyes, knowing I would have to get a camera in here, somehow, sooner or later. I tore my gaze from a statuette and nodded, hard.

"Yes, introduce me."

I sat down.

For the next three weeks alphabet-bugs chased each other behind my eyelids whenever I tried to sleep. The sky was an unclouded pool of turquoise that rippled calligraphies whenever I swept my eyes across it. I drank quarts of coffee while I worked and mixed cocktails of Benzedrine and champagne for my coffee breaks.

M'Cwyie tutored me two hours every morning, and occasionally for another two in the evening. I spent an additional fourteen hours a day on my own, once I had gotten up sufficient momentum to go ahead alone.

And at night the elevator of time dropped me to its bottom floors . . .

I was six again, learning my Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Aramaic. I was ten, sneaking peeks at the *Iliad*. When Daddy wasn't spreading hellfire, brimstone, and brotherly love, he was teaching me to dig the Word, like in the original.

Lord! There are so many originals, and so many words! When I was twelve I started pointing out the little differences between what he was preaching and what I was reading.

The fundamentalist vigor of his reply brooked no debate. It was worse than any beating. I kept my mouth shut after that and learned to appreciate Old Testament poetry.

—Lord, I am sorry! Daddy—Sir—I am sorry!—It couldn't be! It couldn't be . . .

On the day the boy graduated from high school, with the French, German, Spanish, and Latin awards, Dad Gallinger had told his fourteen-year-old, six-foot scarecrow of a son that he wanted him to enter the ministry. I remember how his son was evasive:

"Sir," he had said, "I'd sort of like to study on my own for a year or so, and then take pre-theology courses at some liberal arts university. I feel I'm still sort of young to try a seminary, straight off."

The Voice of God: "But you have the gift of tongues, my son. You can preach the Gospel in all the lands of Babel. You were born to be a missionary. You say you are young, but time is rushing by you like a whirlwind. Start early, and you will enjoy added years of service."

The added years of service were so many added tails to the cat repeatedly laid on my back. I can't see his face now, I never can. Maybe it is because I was always afraid to look at it then.

And years later, when he was dead, and laid out, in black, amidst bouquets, amidst weeping congregationalists, amidst prayers, red faces, handkerchiefs, hands patting your shoulders, solemn-faced comforters . . . I looked at him and did not recognize him.

We had met nine months before my birth, this stranger and I. He had never been cruel—stern, demanding, with contempt for everyone's shortcomings—but never cruel. He was also all that I had had of a mother. And brothers. And sisters. He had tolerated my three years at St. John's, possibly because of its name, never knowing how liberal and delightful a place it really was.

But I never knew him, and the man atop the catafalque demanded nothing now; I was free not to preach the Word.

But now I wanted to, in a different way. I wanted to preach a word that I could never have voiced while he lived.

I did not return for my senior year in the fall. I had a small inheritance coming, and a bit of trouble getting control of it, since I was still under 18. But I managed.

It was Greenwich Village I finally settled upon.

Not telling any well-meaning parishioners my new address, I entered into a daily routine of writing poetry and teaching myself Japanese and Hindustani. I grew a fiery beard, drank espresso, and learned to play chess. I wanted to try a couple of the other paths to salvation.

After that, it was two years in India with the Old Peace Corps—which broke me of my Buddhism, and gave me my *Pipes of Krishna* lyrics and the Pulitzer they deserved.

Then back to the States for my degree, grad work in linguistics, and more prizes.

Then one day a ship went to Mars. The vessel settling in its New Mexico nest of fires contained a new language. —It was fantastic, exotic, and esthetically overpowering. After I had learned all there was to know about it, and written my book, I was famous in new circles:

"Go, Gallinger. Dip your bucket in the well, and bring us a drink of Mars.

Go, learn another world—but remain aloof, rail at it gently like Auden—and hand us its soul in iambs."

And I came to a land where the sun is a tarnished penny, where the wind is a whip, where two moons play at hotrod games, and a hell of sand gives you the incendiary itches whenever you look at it.

I rose from my twistings on the bunk and crossed the darkened cabin to a port. The desert was a carpet of endless orange, bulging from the sweepings of centuries beneath it.

"I a stranger, unafraid— This is the land— I've got it made!"

I laughed.

I had the High Tongue by the tail already—or the roots, if you want your puns anatomical, as well as correct.

The High and Low Tongues were not so dissimilar as they had first seemed. I had enough of the one to get me through the murkier parts of the other. I had the grammar and all the commoner irregular verbs down cold; the dictionary I was constructing grew by the day, like a tulip, and would bloom shortly. Every time I played the tapes the stem lengthened.

Now was the time to tax my ingenuity, to really drive the lessons home. I had purposely refrained from plunging into the major texts until I could do justice to them. I had been reading minor commentaries, bits of verse, fragments of history. And one thing had impressed me strongly in all that I read.

They wrote about concrete things: rocks, sand, water, winds; and the tenor couched within these elemental symbols was fiercely pessimistic. It reminded me of some Buddhist texts, but even more so, I realized from my recent *recherches*, it was like parts of the Old Testament. Specifically, it reminded me of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

That, then, would be it. The sentiment, as well as the vocabulary, was so similar that it would be a perfect exercise. Like putting Poe into French. I would never be a convert to the Way of Malann, but I would show them that an Earthman had once thought the same thoughts, felt similarly.

I switched on my desk lamp and sought King James amidst my books.

*Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man . . .*

My progress seemed to startle M'Cwyie. She peered at me, like Sartre's Other, across the tabletop. I ran through a chapter in the Book of Locar. didn't look up, but I could feel the tight net her eyes were working about my head, shoulders, and rapid hands. I turned another page.

Was she weighing the net, judging the size of the catch? And what for? The books said nothing of fishers on Mars. Especially of men. They said that some god named Malann had spat, or had done something disgusting (depending on the version you read), and that life had gotten underway as a disease in inorganic matter. They said that movement was its first law, and that the dance was the only legitimate reply to the inorganic . . . the dance's quality its justification,—fication . . . and love is a disease in organic matter—Inorganic matter?

I shook my head. I had almost been asleep.

"M'narra."

I stood and stretched. Her eyes outlined me greedily now. So I met them, and they dropped.

"I grow tired. I want to rest awhile. I didn't sleep much last night."

She nodded, Earth's shorthand for "yes", as she had learned from me.

"You wish to relax, and see the explicitness of the doctrine of Locar in its fullness?"

"Pardon me?"

"You wish to see a Dance of Locar?"

"Oh." Their damned circuits of form and periphrasis here ran worse than the Korean! "Yes. Surely. Any time it's going to be done I'd be happy to watch."

I continued, "In the meantime, I've been meaning to ask you whether I might take some pictures—"

"Now is the time. Sit down. Rest. I will call the musicians."

She bustled out through a door I had never been past.

Well now, the dance was the highest art, according to Locar, not to mention Havelock Ellis, and I was about to see how their centuries-dead philosopher felt it should be conducted. I rubbed my eyes and snapped over, touching my toes a few times.

The blood began pounding in my head, and I sucked in a couple of deep breaths. I bent again and there was a flurry of motion at the door.

To the trio who entered with M'Cwyie I must have looked as if I were searching for marbles I had just lost, bent over like that.

I grinned weakly and straightened up, my face red from more than exertion. I hadn't expected them *that* quickly.

Suddenly I thought of Havelock Ellis again in his area of greatest popularity.

The little redheaded doll, wearing, sari-like, a diaphanous piece of the Martian sky, looked up in wonder—as a child at some colorful flag on a high pole.

"Hello," I said, or its equivalent.

She bowed before replying. Evidently I had been promoted in status.

"I shall dance," said the red wound in that pale, pale cameo, her face. Eyes, the color of dream and her dress, pulled away from mine.

She drifted to the center of the room.

Standing there, like a figure in an Etruscan frieze, she was either meditating or regarding the design on the floor.

Was the mosaic symbolic of something? I studied it. If it was, it eluded me; it would make an attractive bathroom floor or patio, but I couldn't see much in it beyond that.

The other two were paint-spattered sparrows like M'Cwyie, in their middle years. One settled to the floor with a triple-stringed instrument faintly resembling a *samisen*. The other held a simple woodblock and two drumsticks.

M'Cwyie disdained her stool and was seated upon the floor before I realized it. I followed suit.

The *samisen* player was still tuning up, so I leaned toward M'Cwyie.

"What is the dancer's name?"

"Braxa," she replied, without looking at me, and raised her left hand, slowly, which meant yes, and go ahead, and let it begin.

The stringed-thing throbbed like a toothache, and a tick-tocking, like ghosts of all the clocks they had never invented, sprang from the block.

Braxa was a statue, both hands raised to her face, elbows high and outspread.

The music became a metaphor for fire.

*Crackle, purr, snap . . .*

She did not move.

The hissing altered to splashes. The cadence slowed. It was water now, the most precious thing in the world, gurgling clear then green over mossy rocks.

Still she did not move.

Glissandos. A pause.

Then, so faint I could hardly be sure at first, the tremble of the winds began. Softly, gently, sighing and halting, uncertain. A pause, a sob, then a repetition of the first statement, only louder.

Were my eyes completely bugged from my reading, or was Braxa actually trembling, all over, head to foot.

She was.

She began a microscopic swaying. A fraction of an inch right, then left. Her fingers opened like the petals of a flower, and I could see that her eyes were closed.

Her eyes opened. They were distant, glassy, looking through me and the walls. Her swaying became more pronounced, merged with the beat.

*The wind was sweeping in from the desert now, falling against Tirellian like waves on a dike.* Her fingers moved, they were the gusts. Her arms, slow pendulums, descended, began a counter-movement.

*The gale was coming now.* She began an axial movement and her hands caught up with the rest of her body, only now her shoulders commenced to writhe out a figure-eight.

*The wind! The wind, I say. O wild, enigmatic! O muse of St.-John Perse!*

The cyclone was twisting round those eyes, its still center. Her head was thrown back, but I knew there was no ceiling between her gaze, passive as Buddha's, and the unchanging skies. Only the two moons, perhaps, interrupted their slumber in that elemental Nirvana of uninhabited turquoise.

Years ago, I had seen the Devadasis in India, the street-dancers, spinning their colorful webs, drawing in the male insect. But Braxa was more than this: she was a Ramadjany, like those votaries of Rama, incarnation of Vishnu, who had given the dance to man: the sacred dancers.

The clicking was monotonously steady now; the whine of the strings made me think of the stinging rays of the sun, their heat stolen by the wind's halations; the blue was Sarasvati and Mary, and a girl named Laura. I heard a

sitar from somewhere, watched this statue come to life, and inhaled a divine afflatus.

I was again Rimbaud with his hashish, Baudelaire with his laudanum, Poe, De Quincy, Wilde, Mallarme, and Aleister Crowley. I was, for a fleeting second, my father in his dark pulpit and darker suit, the hymns and the organ's wheeze transmuted to bright wind.

She was a spun weather vane, a feathered crucifix hovering in the air, a clothes-line holding one bright garment lashed parallel to the ground. Her shoulder was bare now, and her right breast moved up and down like a moon in the sky, its red nipple appearing momentarily above a fold and vanishing again. The music was as formal as Job's argument with God. Her dance was God's reply.

The music slowed, settled; it had been met, matched, answered. Her garment, as if alive, crept back into the more sedate folds it originally held.

She dropped low, lower, to the floor. Her head fell upon her raised knees. She did not move.

There was silence.

I realized, from the ache across my shoulders, how tensely I had been sitting. My armpits were wet. Rivulets had been running down my sides. What did one do now? Applaud?

I sought M'Cwyie from the corner of my eye. She raised her right hand.

As if by telepathy the girl shuddered all over and stood. The musicians also rose. So did M'Cwyie.

I got to my feet, with a Charley Horse in my left leg, and said, "It was beautiful," inane as that sounds.

I received three different High Forms of "thank you."

There was a flurry of color and I was alone again with M'Cwyie.

"That is the one hundred-seventeenth of the two thousand, two hundred-twenty-four dances of Locar."

I looked down at her.

"Whether Locar was right or wrong, he worked out a fine reply to the inorganic."

She smiled.

"Are the dances of your world like this?"

"Some of them are similar. I was reminded of them as I watched Braxa—but I've never seen anything exactly like hers."

"She is good," M'Cwyie said, "She knows all the dances."

A hint of her earlier expression which had troubled me . . .

It was gone in an instant.

"I must tend to my duties now." She moved to the table and closed the books. "M'narra."

"Good-bye." I slipped into my boots.

"Good-bye, Gallinger."

I walked out the door, mounted the jeepster, and roared across the evening into night, my wings of risen desert flapping slowly behind me.

## II

I had just closed the door behind Betty, after a brief grammar session, when I heard the voices in the hall. My vent was opened a fraction, so I stood there and eavesdropped:

Morton's fruity treble: "Guess what? He said 'hello' to me a while ago."

"Hmmp!" Emory's elephant lungs exploded. "Either he's slipping, or you were standing in his way and he wanted you to move."

"Probably didn't recognize me. I don't think he sleeps any more, now he has that language to play with. I had night watch last week, and every night I passed his door at 0300—I always heard that recorder going. At 0500, when I got off, he was still at it."

"The guy *is* working hard," Emory admitted, grudgingly. "In fact, I think he's taking some kind of dope to keep awake. He looks sort of glassy-eyed these days. Maybe that's natural for a poet, though."

Betty had been standing there, because she broke in then:

"Regardless of what you think of him, it's going to take me at least a year to learn what he's picked up in three weeks. And I'm just a linguist, not a poet."

Morton must have been nursing a crush on her bovine charms. It's the only reason I can think of for his dropping his guns to say what he did.

"I took a course in modern poetry when I was back at the university," he began. "We read six authors—Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Crane, Stevens, and Gallinger—and on the last day of the semester, when the prof was feeling a little rhetorical, he said, 'These six names are written on the century, and all the gates of criticism and Hell shall not prevail against them.'"

"Myself," he continued, "I thought his *Pipes of Krishna* and his *Madrigals* were great. I was honored to be chosen for an expedition he was going on.

"I think he's spoken two dozen words to me since I met him," he finished.

The Defense: "Did it ever occur to you," Betty said, "that he might be tremendously self-conscious about his appearance? He was also a precocious child, and probably never even had school friends. He's sensitive and very introverted."

"Sensitive? Self-conscious?" Emory choked and gagged. "The man is as proud as Lucifer, and he's a walking insult machine. You press a button like 'Hello' or 'Nice day' and he thumbs his nose at you. He's got it down to a reflex."

They muttered a few other pleasantries and drifted away.

Well bless you, Morton boy. You little pimple-faced, Ivy-bred connoisseur! I've never taken a course in my poetry, but I'm glad someone said that. The Gates of Hell. Well now! Maybe Daddy's prayers got heard somewhere, and I am a missionary, after all!

Only . . .

. . . Only a missionary needs something to convert people *to*. I have my private system of esthetics, and I suppose it oozes an ethical by-product,

somewhere. But if I ever had anything to preach, really, even in my poems. I wouldn't care to preach it to such lowlifes as you. If you think I'm a slob, I'm also a snob, and there's no room for you in my Heaven—it's a private place, where Swift, Shaw, and Petronius Arbiter come to dinner.

And oh, the feasts we have! The Trimalchio's, the Emory's we dissect!  
We finish you with the soup, Morton!

I turned and settled at my desk. I wanted to write something. Ecclesiastes could take a night off. I wanted to write a poem, a poem about the one hundred-seventeenth dance of Locar; about a rose following the light, traced by the wind, sick, like Blake's rose, dying . . .

I found a pencil and began.

When I had finished I was pleased. It wasn't great—at least, it was no greater than it needed to be—High Martian not being my strongest tongue. I groped, and put it into English, with partial rhymes. Maybe I'd stick it in my next book. I called it *Braxa*:

*In a land of wind and red,  
where the icy evening of Time  
freezes milk in the breasts of Life,  
as two moons overhead—  
cat and dog in alleyways of dream—  
scratch and scramble agelessly my flight . . .*

*This final flower turns a burning head.*

I put it away and found some phenobarbitol. I was suddenly tired.

When I showed my poem to M'Cwyie the next day, she read it through several times, very slowly.

"It is lovely," she said, "But you used three words from your own language. 'Cat' and 'dog', I assume, are two small animals with a hereditary hatred for one another. But what is 'flower'?"

"Oh," I said. "I've never come across your word for 'flower', but I was actually thinking of an Earth-flower, the rose."

"What is it like?"

"Well, its petals are generally bright red. That's what I meant, on one level, by 'burning head'. I also wanted it to imply fever, though, and red hair, and the fire of life. The rose, itself, has a thorny stem, green leaves, and a distinct, pleasant aroma."

"I wish I could see one."

"I suppose it could be arranged. I'll check."

"Do it, please. You are a—" She used the word for "prophet", or religious poet, like Isaiah or Locar. "—and your poem is inspired. I shall tell Braxa of it."

I declined the nomination, but felt flattered.



This, then, I decided, was the strategic day, the day on which to ask whether I might bring in the microfilm machine and the camera. I wanted to copy all their texts, I explained, and I couldn't write fast enough to do it.

She surprised me by agreeing immediately. But she bowled me over with her invitation.

"Would you like to come and stay here while you do this thing? Then you can work night and day, any time you want—except when the Temple is being used, of course."

I bowed.

"I shall be honored."

"Good. Bring your machines when you want, and I will show you a room."

"Will this afternoon be all right?"

"Certainly."

"Then I will go now and get things ready. Until this afternoon . . ."

"Goodbye."

I anticipated a little trouble from Emory, but not much. Everyone back at the ship was anxious to see the Martians, talk with the Martians, poke needles in the Martians, ask them about Martian climate, diseases, soil chemistry, politics, and mushrooms (our botanist was a fungus nut, but a reasonably good guy)—and only four or five had actually gotten to see them. The crew had been spending most of its time excavating dead cities and their acropolises. We played the game by strict rules, and the natives were as fiercely insular as the nineteenth-century Japanese. I figured I would meet with little resistance, and I figured right.

In fact, I got the distinct impression that everyone was happy to see me move out.

I stopped in the hydroponics room to speak with our mushroom-master.

"Hi, Kane. Grow any toadstools in the sand yet?"

He sniffed. He always sniffs. Maybe he's allergic to plants.

"Hello, Gallinger. No, I haven't had any success with toadstools, but look behind the car barn next time you're out there. I've got a few cacti going."

"Great," I observed. Doc Kane was about my only friend aboard, not counting Betty.

"Say, I came down to ask you a favor."

"Name it."

"I want a rose."

"A what?"

"A rose. You know, a nice red American Beauty job—thorns, pretty smelling—"

"I don't think it will take in this soil. *Sniff, sniff.*"

"No, you don't understand. I don't want to plant it, I just want the flowers."

"I'd have to use the tanks." He scratched his hairless dome. "It would take at least three months to get you flowers, even under forced growth."

"Will you do it?"

"Sure, if you don't mind the wait."

"Not at all. In fact, three months will just make it before we leave." I looked about at the pools of crawling slime, at the trays of shoots. "—I'm moving up to Tirellian today, but I'll be in and out all the time. I'll be here when it blooms."

"Moving up there, eh? Moore said they're an in-group."

"I guess I'm 'in' then."

"Looks that way—I still don't see how you learned their language, though. Of course, I had trouble with French and German for my Ph.D, but last week I heard Betty demonstrate it at lunch. It just sounds like a lot of weird noises. She says speaking it is like working a *Times* crossword and trying to imitate birdcalls at the same time."

I laughed, and took the cigarette he offered me.

"It's complicated," I acknowledged. "But, well, it's as if you suddenly came across a whole new class of mycetae here—you'd dream about it at night."

His eyes were gleaming.

"Wouldn't that be something! I might, yet, you know."

"Maybe you will."

He chuckled as we walked to the door.

"I'll start your roses tonight. Take it easy down there."

"You bet. Thanks."

Like I said, a fungus nut, but a fairly good guy.

My quarters in the Citadel of Tirellian were directly adjacent to the Temple, on the inward side and slightly to the left. They were a considerable improvement over my cramped cabin, and I was pleased that Martian culture had progressed sufficiently to discover the desirability of the mattress over the pallet. Also, the bed was long enough to accommodate me, which *was* surprising.

So I unpacked and took 16 35 mm. shots of the Temple, before starting on the books.

I took 'stats until I was sick of turning pages without knowing what they said. So I started translating a work of history.

"Lo. In the thirty-seventh year of the Process of Cillen the rains came, which gave rise to rejoicing, for it was a rare and untoward occurrence, and commonly construed a blessing.

"But it was not the life-giving semen of Malann which fell from the heavens. It was the blood of the universe, spurting from an artery. And the last days were upon us. The final dance was to begin.

"The rains brought the plague that does not kill, and the last passes of Locar began with their drumming . . ."

I asked myself what the hell Tamur meant, for he was an historian and supposedly committed to fact. This was not their Apocalypse.

Unless they could be one and the same . . . ?

Why not? I mused. Tirellian's handful of people were the remnant of what had obviously once been a highly developed culture. They had had wars, but no holocausts; science, but little technology. A plague, a plague that did not kill . . . ? Could that have done it? How, if it wasn't fatal?

I read on, but the nature of the plague was not discussed. I turned pages, skipped ahead, and drew a blank.

*M'Cwyie! M'Cwyie! When I want to question you most, you are not around!*

Would it be a *fauz pas* to go looking for her? Yes, I decided. I was restricted to the rooms I had been shown, that had been an implicit understanding. I would have to wait to find out.

So I cursed long and loud, in many languages, doubtless burning Malann's sacred ears, there in his Temple.

He did not see fit to strike me dead, so I decided to call it a day and hit the sack.

I must have been asleep for several hours when Braxa entered my room with a tiny lamp. She dragged me awake by tugging at my pajama sleeve.

I said hello. Thinking back, there is not much else I could have said.

"Hello."

"I have come," she said, "to hear the poem."

"What poem?"

"Yours."

"Oh."

I yawned, sat up, and did things people usually do when awakened in the middle of the night to read poetry.

"That is very kind of you, but isn't the hour a trifle awkward?"

"I don't mind," she said.

Someday I am going to write an article for the *Journal of Semantics*, called "Tone of Voice: An Insufficient Vehicle for Irony."

However, I was awake, so I grabbed my robe.

"What sort of animal is that?" she asked, pointing at the silk dragon on my lapel.

"Mythical," I replied. "Now look, it's late. I am tired. I have much to do in the morning. And M'Cwyie just might get the wrong idea if she learns you were here."

"Wrong idea?"

"You know damned well what I mean!" It was the first time I had had an opportunity to use Martian profanity, and it failed.

"No," she said, "I do not know."

She seemed frightened, like a puppy being scolded without knowing what it has done wrong.

I softened. Her red cloak matched her hair and lips so perfectly, and those lips were trembling.

"Here now, I didn't mean to upset you. On my world there are certain uh, mores, concerning people of different sex alone together in bedrooms, and not allied by marriage . . . Um, I mean, you see what I mean?"

"No."

They were jade, her eyes.

"Well, it's sort of . . . Well, it's sex, that's what it is."

A light was switched on in those jade lamps.

"Oh, you mean having children!"

"Yes. That's it! Exactly."

She laughed. It was the first time I had heard laughter in Tirellian. It sounded like a violinist striking his high strings with the bow, in short little chops. It was not an altogether pleasant thing to hear, especially because she laughed too long.

When she had finished she moved closer.

"I remember, now," she said. "We used to have such rules. Half a Process ago, when I was a child, we had such rules. But," she looked as if she were ready to laugh again, "there is no need for them now."

My mind moved like a tape recorder played at triple speed.

Half a Process! Half a Process! Half a Process! No! Yes!

Half a Process was two hundred-forty-three years, roughly speaking!

—Time enough to learn the 2224 dances of Locar.

—Time enough to grow old, if you were human.

—Earth-style human, I mean.

I looked at her again, pale as the white queen in an ivory chess set.

She was human, I'd stake my soul—alive, normal, healthy, I'd stake my life—woman, my body . . .

But she was two and a half centuries old, which made M'Cwyie Methusala's grandma. It flattered me to think of their repeated complimenting of my skills, as linguist, as poet. These superior beings!

But what did she mean 'there is no such need for them now'? Why the near-hysteria? Why all those funny looks I'd been getting from M'Cwyie?

I suddenly knew I was close to something important, besides a beautiful girl.

"Tell me," I said, in my Casual Voice, "did it have anything to do with 'the plague that does not kill,' of which Tamur wrote?"

"Yes," she replied, "the children born after the Rains could have no children of their own, and—"

"And what?" I was leaning forward, memory set at "record".

"—and the men had no desire to get any."

I sagged backward against the bedpost. Racial sterility, masculine impotence, following phenomenal weather. Had some vagabond cloud of radioactive junk from God knows where penetrated their weak atmosphere one day? One day long before Shiaparelli saw the canals, mythical as my dragon, before those "canals" had given rise to some correct guesses for all the wrong reasons, had Braxa been alive, dancing, here—damned in the womb since blind Milton had written of another paradise, equally lost?

I found a cigarette. Good thing I had thought to bring ashtrays. Mars had never had a tobacco industry either. Or booze. The ascetics I had met in India had been Dionysiac compared to this.

"What is that tube of fire?"

"A cigarette. Want one?"

"Yes, please."

She sat beside me, and I lighted it for her.

"It irritates the nose."

"Yes. Draw some into your lungs, hold it there, and exhale."

A moment passed.

"Ooh," she said.

A pause, then, "Is it sacred?"

"No, it's nicotine," I answered, "a very *ersatz* form of divinity."

Another pause.

"Please don't ask me to translate 'ersatz'."

"I won't. I get this feeling sometimes when I dance."

"It will pass in a moment."

"Tell me your poem now."

An idea hit me.

"Wait a minute," I said, "I may have something better."

I got up and rummaged through my notebooks, then I returned and sat beside her.

"These are the first three chapters of the Book of Ecclesiastes," I explained.

"It is very similar to your own sacred books."

I started reading.

I got through eleven verses before she cried out, "Please don't read that! Tell me one of yours!"

I stopped and tossed the notebook onto a nearby table. She was shaking, not as she had quivered that day she danced as the wind, but with the jitter of unshed tears. She held her cigarette awkwardly, like a pencil. Clumsily, I put my arm about her shoulders.

"He is so sad," she said, "like all the others."

So I twisted my mind like a bright ribbon, folded it, and tied the crazy Christmas knots I love so well. From German to Martian, with love, I did an impromptu paraphrase of a poem about a Spanish dancer. I thought it would please her. I was right.

"Ooh," she said again. "Did you write that?"

"No, it's by a better man than I."

"I don't believe you. You wrote it."

"No, a man named Rilke did."

"But you brought it across to my language.—Light another match, so I can see how she danced."

I did.

"The fires of forever," she mused, "and she stamped them out, 'with small, firm feet'. I wish I could dance like that."

"You're better than any Gipsy," I laughed, blowing it out.

"No, I'm not. I couldn't do that."

Her cigarette was burning down, so I removed it from her fingers and put it out, along with my own.

"Do you want me to dance for you?"

"No," I said. "Go to bed."

She smiled, and before I realized it, had unclasped the fold of red at her shoulder.

And everything fell away.

And I swallowed, with some difficulty.

"All right," she said.

So I kissed her, as the breath of fallen cloth extinguished the lamp.

### III

The days were like Shelley's leaves: yellow, red, brown, whipped in bright gusts by the west wind. They swirled past me with the rattle of microfilm. Almost all the books were recorded now. It would take scholars years to get through them, to properly assess their value. Mars was locked in my desk.

Ecclesiastes, abandoned and returned to a dozen times, was almost ready to speak in the High Tongue.

I whistled when I wasn't in the Temple. I wrote reams of poetry I would have been ashamed of before. Evenings I would walk with Braxa, across the dunes or up into the mountains. Sometimes she would dance for me; and I would read something long, and in dactylic hexameter. She still thought I was Rilke, and I almost kidded myself into believing it. Here I was, staying at the Castle Duino, writing his *Elegies*.

*... It is strange to inhabit the Earth no more,  
to use no longer customs scarce acquired,  
nor interpret roses ...*

No! Never interpret roses! Don't. Smell them (sniff, Kane!), pick them, enjoy them. Live in the moment. Hold to it tightly. But charge not the gods to explain. So fast the leaves go by, are blown ...

And no one ever noticed us. Or cared.

Laura. Laura and Braxa. They rhyme, you know, with a bit of a clash. Tall, cool, and blonde was she (I hate blondes!), and Daddy had turned me inside out, like a pocket, and I thought she could fill me again. But the big, beat word-slinger, with Judas-beard and dog-trust in his eyes, oh, he had been a fine decoration at her parties. And that was all.

How the machine cursed me in the Temple! It blasphemed Malann and Gallinger. And the wild west wind went by and something was not far behind.

The last days were upon us.

A day went by and I did not see Braxa, and a night.

And a second. A third.

I was half-mad. I hadn't realized how close we had become, how important she had been. With the dumb assurance of presence, I had fought against questioning roses.

I had to ask. I didn't want to, but I had no choice.

"Where is she, M'Cwyie? Where is Braxa?"

"She is gone," she said.

"Where?"

"I do not know."

I looked at those devil-bird eyes. Anathema maranatha rose to my lips.

"I must know."

She looked through me.

"She has left us. She is gone. Up into the hills, I suppose. Or the desert. It does not matter. What does anything matter? The dance draws to a close. The Temple will soon be empty."

"Why? Why did she leave?"

"I do not know."

"I must see her again. We lift off in a matter of days."

"I am sorry, Gallinger."

"So am I," I said, and slammed shut a book without saying "m'narra".

I stood up.

"I will find her."

I left the Temple. M'Cwyie was a seated statue. My boots were still where I had left them.

All day I roared up and down the dunes, going nowhere. To the crew of the *Aspic* I must have looked like a sandstorm, all by myself. Finally, I had to return for more fuel.

Emory came stalking out.

"Okay, make it good. You look like the abominable dust man. Why the rodeo?"

"Why, I, uh, lost something."

"In the middle of the desert? Was it one of your sonnets? They're the only thing I can think of that you'd make such a fuss over."

"No, dammit! It was something personal."

George had finished filling the tank. I started to mount the jeepster again.

"Hold on there!" He grabbed my arm.

"You're not going back until you tell me what this is all about."

I could have broken his grip, but then he could order me dragged back by the heels, and quite a few people would enjoy doing the dragging. So I forced myself to speak slowly, softly:

"It's simply that I lost my watch. My mother gave it to me and it's a family heirloom. I want to find it before we leave."

"You sure it's not in your cabin, or down in Tirellian?"

"I've already checked."

"Maybe somebody hid it to irritate you. You know you're not the most popular guy around."

I shook my head.

"I thought of that. But I always carry it in my right pocket. I think it might have bounced out going over the dunes."

He narrowed his eyes.

"I remember reading on a book jacket that your mother died when you were born."

"That's right," I said, biting my tongue. "The watch belonged to her father and she wanted me to have it. My father kept it for me."

"Hmph!" he snorted. "That's a pretty strange way to look for a watch, riding up and down in a jeepster."

"I could see the light shining off it that way," I offered, lamely.

"Well, it's starting to get dark," he observed. "No sense looking any more today."

"Throw a dust sheet over the jeepster," he directed a mechanic.

He patted my arm.

"Come on in and get a shower, and something to eat. You look as if you could use both."

*Little fatty flecks beneath pale eyes, thinning hair, and an Irish nose; a voice a decibel louder than anyone else's . . .*

His only qualifications for leadership!

I stood there, hating him. Claudius! If only this were the fifth act!

But suddenly the idea of a shower, and food, came through to me. I could use both badly. If I insisted on hurrying back immediately I might arouse more suspicion.

So I brushed some sand from my sleeve.

"You're right. That sounds like a good idea."

"Come on, we'll eat in my cabin."

The shower was a blessing, clean khakis were the grace of God, and the food smelled like Heaven.

"Smells pretty good," I said.

We hacked up our steaks in silence. When we got to the dessert and coffee he suggested: "Why don't you take the night off? Stay here and get some sleep."

I shook my head.

"I'm pretty busy. Finishing up. There's not much time left."

"A couple days ago you said you were almost finished."

"Almost, but not quite."

"You also said they'll be holding a service in the Temple tonight."

"That's right. I'm going to work in my room."

He shrugged his shoulders.

Finally, he said, "Gallinger," and I looked up because my name means trouble.

"It shouldn't be any of my business," he said, "but it is. Betty says you have a girl down there."

There was no question mark. It was a statement hanging in the air. Waiting.

—*Betty, you're a bitch. You're a cow and a bitch. And a jealous one, at that. Why didn't you keep your nose where it belonged, shut your eyes? Your mouth?*

"So?" I said, a statement with a question mark.



"So," he answered it, "it is my duty, as head of this expedition, to see that relations with the natives are carried on in a friendly, and diplomatic, manner."

"You speak of them," I said, "as though they are aborigines. Nothing could be further from the truth."

I rose.

"When my papers are published everyone on Earth will know that truth. I'll tell them things Doctor Moore never even guessed at. I'll tell the tragedy of a doomed race, waiting for death, resigned and disinterested. I'll tell why, and it will break hard, scholarly hearts. I'll write about it, and they will give me more prizes, and this time I won't want them.

"My God!" I exclaimed. "They had a culture when our ancestors were clubbing the sabre-tooth and finding out how fire works!"

"Do you have a girl down there?"

"Yes!" I said. *Yes, Claudius! Yes, Daddy! Yes, Emory!* "I do. But I'm going to let you in on a scholarly scoop now. They're already dead. They're sterile. In one more generation there won't be any Martians."

I paused, then added, "Except in my papers, except on a few pieces of microfilm and tape. And in some poems, about a girl who did give a damn and could only bitch about the unfairness of it all by dancing."

"Oh," he said.

After awhile:

"You *have* been behaving differently these past couple months. You've even been downright civil on occasion, you know. I couldn't help wondering what was happening. I didn't know anything mattered that strongly to you."

I bowed my head.

"Is she the reason you were racing around the desert?"

I nodded.

"Why?"

I looked up.

"Because she's out there, somewhere. I don't know where, or why. And I've got to find her before we go."

"Oh," he said again.

Then he leaned back, opened a drawer, and took out something wrapped in a towel. He unwound it. A framed photo of a woman lay on the table.

"My wife," he said.

It was an attractive face, with big, almond eyes.

"I'm a Navy man, you know," he began. "Young officer once. Met her in Japan.

"Where I come from it wasn't considered right to marry into another race, so we never did. But she was my wife. When she died I was on the other side of the world. They took my children, and I've never seen them since. I couldn't learn what orphanage, what home, they were put into. That was long ago. Very few people know about it."

"I'm sorry," I said.

"Don't be. Forget it. But," he shifted in his chair and looked at me, "if

you do want to take her back with you—do it. It'll mean my neck, but I'm too old to ever head another expedition like this one. So go ahead."

He gulped his cold coffee.

"Get your jeepster."

He swivelled the chair around.

I tried to say "thank you" twice, but I couldn't. So I got up and walked out."

"Sayonara, and all that," he muttered behind me.

"Here it is, Gallinger!" I heard a shout.

I turned on my heel and looked back up the ramp.

"Kane!"

He was limned in the port, shadow against light, but I had heard him sniff.

I returned the few steps.

"Here what is?"

"Your rose."

He produced a plastic container, divided internally. The lower half was filled with liquid. The stem ran down into it. The other half, a glass of claret in this horrible night, was a large, newly-opened rose.

"Thank you," I said, tucking it into my jacket.

"Going back to Tirellian, eh?"

"Yes."

"I saw you come aboard, so I got it ready. Just missed you at the Captain's cabin. He was busy. Hollered out that I could catch you at the barns."

"Thanks again."

"It's chemically treated. It will stay in bloom for weeks."

I nodded. I was gone.

Up into the mountains now. Far. Far. The sky was a bucket of ice in which no moons floated. The going became steeper, and the little donkey protested. I whipped him with the throttle and went on. Up. Up. I spotted a green, unwinking star, and felt a lump in my throat. The encased rose beat against my chest like an extra heart. The donkey brayed, long and loudly, then began to cough. I lashed him some more and he died.

I threw the emergency brake on and got out. I began to walk.

So cold, so cold it grows. Up here. At night? Why? Why did she do it? Why flee the campfire when night comes on?

And I was up, down around, and through every chasm, gorge, and pass, with my long-legged strides and an ease of movement never known on Earth.

Barely two days remain, my love, and thou hast forsaken me. Why?

I crawled under overhangs. I leapt over ridges. I scraped my knees, an elbow. I heard my jacket tear.

No answer, Malann? Do you really hate your people this much? Then I'll try someone else. Vishnu, you're the Preserver. Preserve her, please! Let me find her.

Jehovah?

Adonis? Osiris? Thammuz? Manitou? Legba? Where is she?

I ranged far and high, and I slipped.

Stones ground underfoot and I dangled over an edge. My fingers so cold.  
It was hard to grip the rock.

I looked down.

Twelve feet or so. I let go and dropped, landed rolling.

Then I heard her scream.

I lay there, not moving, looking up. Against the night, above, she called.  
"Gallinger!"

I lay still.

"Gallinger!"

And she was gone.

I heard stones rattle and knew she was coming down some path to the right of me.

I jumped up and ducked into the shadow of a boulder.

She rounded a cut-off, and picked her way, uncertainly, through the stones.

"Gallinger?"

I stepped out and seized her shoulders.

"Braxa."

She screamed again, then began to cry, crowding against me. It was the first time I had ever heard her cry.

"Why?" I asked. "Why?"

But she only clung to me and sobbed.

Finally, "I thought you had killed yourself."

"Maybe I would have," I said. "Why did you leave Tirellian? And me?"

"Didn't M'Cwyie tell you? Didn't you guess?"

"I didn't guess, and M'Cwyie said she didn't know."

"Then she lied. She knows."

"What? What is it she knows?"

She shook all over, then was silent for a long time. I realized suddenly that she was wearing only her flimsy dancer's costume. I pushed her from me, took off my jacket, and put it about her shoulders.

"Great Malann!" I cried. "You'll freeze to death!"

"No," she said, "I won't."

I was transferring the rose-case to my pocket.

"What is that?" she asked.

"A rose," I answered. "You can't make it out much in the dark. I once compared you to one. Remember?"

"Yu-Yes. May I carry it?"

"Sure." I stuck it in the jacket pocket.

"Well? I'm still waiting for an explanation."

"You really do not know?" she asked.

"No!"

"When the Rains came," she said, "apparently only our men were affected, which was enough. . . . Because I—wasn't—affected—apparently—"

"Oh," I said. "Oh."

We stood there, and I thought.

"Well, why did you run? What's wrong with being pregnant on Mars? Tamur was mistaken. Your people can live again."

She laughed, again that wild violin played by a Paginini gone mad. I stopped her before it went too far.

"How?" she finally asked, rubbing her cheek.

"Your people live longer than ours. If our child is normal it will mean our races can intermarry. There must still be other fertile women of your race. Why not?"

"You have read the Book of Locar," she said, "and yet you ask me that? Death was decided, voted upon, and passed, shortly after it appeared in this form. But long before, the followers of Locar knew. They decided it long ago. 'We have done all things,' they said, 'we have seen all things, we have heard and felt all things. The dance was good. Now let it end.'"

"You can't believe that."

"What I believe does not matter," she replied. "M'Cwyie and the Mothers have decided we must die. Their very title is now a mockery, but their decisions will be upheld. There is only one prophecy left, and it is mistaken. We will die."

"No," I said.

"What, then?"

"Come back with me, to Earth."

"No."

"All right, then. Come with me now."

"Where?"

"Back to Tirellian. I'm going to talk to the Mothers."

"You can't! There is a Ceremony tonight!"

I laughed.

"A ceremony for a god who knocks you down, and then kicks you in the teeth?"

"He is still Malann," she answered. "We are still his people."

"You and my father would have gotten along fine," I snarled. "But I am going, and you are coming with me, even if I have to carry you—and I'm bigger than you are."

"But you are not bigger than Ontro."

"Who the hell is Ontro?"

"He will stop you, Gallinger. He is the First of Malann."

#### IV

I scudded the jeepster to a halt in front of the only entrance I knew, M'Cwyie's. Braxa, who had seen the rose in a headlamp, now cradled it in

her lap, like our child, and said nothing. There was a passive, lovely look on her face.

"Are they in the Temple now?" I wanted to know.

The Madonna-expression did not change. I repeated the question. She stirred.

"Yes," she said, from a distance, "but you cannot go in."

"We'll see."

I circled and helped her down.

I led her by the hand, and she moved as if in a trance. In the light of the new-risen moon, her eyes looked as they had the day I met her, when she had danced. I snapped my fingers. Nothing happened.

So I pushed the door open and led her in. The room was half-lighted.

And she screamed for the third time that evening:

"Do not harm him, Ontro! It is Gallinger!"

I had never seen a Martian man before, only women. So I had no way of knowing whether he was a freak, though I suspected it strongly.

I looked up at him.

His half-naked body was covered with moles and swellings. Gland trouble, I guessed.

I had thought I was the tallest man on the planet, but he was seven feet tall and overweight. Now I knew where my giant bed had come from!

"Go back," he said. "She may enter. You may not."

"I must get my books and things."

He raised a huge left arm. I followed it. All my belongings lay neatly stacked in the corner.

"I must go in. I must talk with M'Cwyie and the Mothers."

"You may not."

"The lives of your people depend on it."

"Go back," he boomed. "Go home to *your* people, Gallinger. Leave *us*!"

My name sounded so different on his lips, like someone else's. How old was he? I wondered. Three hundred? Four? Had he been a Temple guardian all his life? Why? Who was there to guard against? I didn't like the way he moved. I had seen men who moved like that before.

"Go back," he repeated.

If they had refined their martial arts as far as they had their dances, or, worse yet, if their fighting arts were a part of the dance, I was in for trouble.

"Go on in," I said to Braxa. "Give the rose to M'Cwyie. Tell her that I sent it. Tell her I'll be there shortly."

"I will do as you ask. Remember me on Earth, Gallinger. Goodbye."

I did not answer her, and she walked past Ontro and into the next room, bearing her rose.

"Now will you leave?" he asked. "If you like, I will tell her that we fought and you almost beat me, but I knocked you unconscious and carried you back to your ship."

"No," I said, "either I go around you or go over you, but I am going through."

He dropped into a crouch, arms extended.

"It is a sin to lay hands on a holy man," he rumbled, "but I will stop you, Gallinger."

My memory was a fogged window, suddenly exposed to fresh air. Things cleared. I looked back six years.

I was a student of Oriental Languages at the University of Tokyo. It was my twice-weekly night of recreation. I stood in a 30-foot circle in the Kodokan, the *judogi* lashed about my high hips by a brown belt. I was *Ik-kyu*, one notch below the lowest degree of expert. A brown diamond above my right breast said "Jiu-Jitsu" in Japanese, and it meant *atemiwaza*, really, because of the one striking-technique. I had worked out, found unbelievably suitable to my size, and won matches with.

But I had never used it on a man, and it was five years since I had practiced. I was out of shape, I knew, but I tried hard to force my mind *tsuki no kokoro*, like the moon, reflecting the all of Ontro.

Somewhere, out of the past, a voice said "*Hajime*, let it begin."

I snapped into my *neko-ashi-dachi* cat-stance, and his eyes burned strangely. He hurried to correct his own position—and I threw it at him!

My one trick!

My long left leg lashed up like a broken spring. Seven feet off the ground my foot connected with his jaw as he tried to leap backward.

His head snapped back and he fell. A soft moan escaped his lips. *That's all there is to it*, I thought. *Sorry, old fellow.*

And as I stepped over him, somehow, groggily, he tripped me, and I fell across his body. I couldn't believe he had strength enough to remain conscious after that blow, let alone move. I hated to punish him any more.

But he found my throat and slipped a forearm across it before I realized there was a purpose to his action.

*No! Don't let it end like this!*

It was a bar of steel across my windpipe, my carotids. Then I realized that he was still unconscious, and that this was a reflex instilled by countless years of training. I had seen it happen once, in *shiai*. The man had died because he had been choked unconscious and still fought on, and his opponent thought he had not been applying the choke properly. He tried harder.

But it was rare, so very rare!

I jammed my elbows into his ribs and threw my head back in his face. The grip eased, but not enough. I hated to do it, but I reached up and broke his little finger.

The arm went loose and I twisted free.

He lay there panting, face contorted. My heart went out to the fallen giant, defending his people, his religion, following his orders. I cursed myself as I had never cursed before, for walking over him, instead of around.

I staggered across the room to my little heap of possessions. I sat on the projector case and lit a cigarette.

I couldn't go into the Temple until I got my breath back, until I thought of something to say?

How do you talk a race out of killing itself?

Suddenly—

—Could it happen? Would it work that way? If I read them the Book of Ecclesiastes—if I read them a greater piece of literature than any Locar ever wrote—and as somber—and as pessimistic—and showed them that our race had gone on despite one man's condemning all of life in the highest poetry—showed them that the vanity he had mocked had borne us to the Heavens—would they believe it?—would they change their minds?

I ground out my cigarette on the beautiful floor, and found my notebook. A strange fury rose within me as I stood.

And I walked into the Temple to preach the Black Gospel according to Gallinger, from the Book of Life.

There was silence all about me.

M'Cwyie had been reading Locar, the rose set at her right hand, target of all eyes.

Until I entered.

Hundreds of people were seated on the floor, barefoot. The few men were as small as the women, I noted.

I had my boots on.

*Go all the way, I figured. You either lose or you win—everything!*

A dozen crones sat in a semi-circle behind M'Cwyie. The Mothers.

*The barren earth, the dry wombs, the fire-touched.*

I moved to the table.

"Dying yourselves, you would condemn your people," I addressed them, "that they may not know the life you have known—the joys, the sorrows, the fullness.—But it is not true that you all must die." I addressed the multitude now. "Those who say this lie. Braxa knows, for she will bear a child—"

They sat there, like rows of Buddhas. M'Cwyie drew back into the semi-circle.

"—my child!" I continued, wondering what my father would have thought of this sermon.

"... And all the women young enough may bear children. It is only your men who are sterile.—And if you permit the doctors of the next expedition to examine you, perhaps even the men may be helped. But if they cannot, you can mate with the men of Earth.

"And ours is not an insignificant people, an insignificant place," I went on. "Thousands of years ago, the Locar of our world wrote a book saying that it was. He spoke as Locar did, but we did not lie down, despite plagues, wars, and famines. We did not die. One by one we beat down the diseases, we fed the hungry, we fought the wars, and, recently, have gone a long time without them. We may finally have conquered them. I do not know.

"But we have crossed millions of miles of nothingness. We have visited another world. And our Locar had said, 'Why bother? What is the worth of it? It is all vanity, anyhow.'

"And the secret is," I lowered my voice, as at a poetry reading, "he was right! It *is* vanity, it *is* pride! It is the hybris of rationalism to always attack

the prophet, the mystic, the god. It is our blasphemy which has made us great, and will sustain us, and which the gods secretly admire in us.—All the truly sacred names of God are blasphemous things to speak!”

I was working up a sweat. I paused dizzily.

“Here is the Book of Ecclesiastes,” I announced, and began:

“Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man . . .”

I spotted Braxa in the back, mute, rapt.

I wondered what she was thinking.

And I wound the hours of night about me, like black thread on a spool.

Oh it was late! I had spoken till day came, and still I spoke. I finished Ecclesiastes and continued Gallinger.

And when I finished there was still only a silence.

The Buddhas, all in a row, had not stirred through the night. And after a long while M'Cwyie raised her right hand. One by one the Mothers did the same.

And I knew what that meant.

It meant no, do not, cease, and stop.

It meant that I had failed.

I walked slowly from the room and slumped beside my baggage.

Ontro was gone. Good that I had not killed him . . .

After a thousand years M'Cwyie entered.

She said, “Your job is finished.”

I did not move.

“The prophecy is fulfilled,” she said. “My people are rejoicing. You have won, holy man. Now leave us quickly.”

My mind was a deflated balloon. I pumped a little air back into it.

“I'm not a holy man,” I said, “just a second-rate poet with a bad case of hybris.”

I lit my last cigarette.

Finally, “All right, what prophecy?”

“The Promise of Locar,” she replied, as though the explaining were unnecessary, “that a holy man would come from the heavens to save us in our last hours, if all the dances of Locar were completed. He would defeat the Fist of Malann and bring us life.”

“How?”

“As with Braxa, and as the example in the Temple.”

“Example?”

“You read us his words, as great as Locar's. You read to us how there is ‘nothing new under the sun’. And you mocked his words as you read them—showing us a new thing.

“There has never been a flower on Mars,” she said, “but we will learn to grow them.

“You are the Sacred Scoffer,” she finished. “He-Who-Must-Mock-in-the-Temple—you go shod on holy ground.”



"But you voted 'no'," I said.

"I voted not to carry out our original plan, and to let Braxa's child live instead."

"Oh." The cigarette fell from my fingers. How close it had been! How little I had known!

"And Braxa?"

"She was chosen half a Process ago to do the dances—to wait for you."

"But she said that Ontro would stop me."

M'Cwyie stood there for a long time.

"She had never believed the prophecy herself. Things are not well with her now. She ran away, fearing it was true. When you completed it and we voted, she knew."

"Then she does not love me? Never did?"

"I am sorry, Gallinger. It was the one part of her duty she never managed."

"Duty," I said flatly. . . . Dutydutyduth! Tra-la!

"She has said goodbye, she does not wish to see you again.

". . . and we will never forget your teachings," she added.

"Don't," I said, automatically, suddenly knowing the great paradox which lies at the heart of all miracles. I did not believe a word of my own gospel, never had.

I stood, like a drunken man, and muttered "M'narra."

I went outside, into my last day on Mars.

*I have conquered thee, Malann—and the victory is thine! Rest easy on thy starry bed. God damned!*

I left the jeepster there and walked back to the *Aspic*, leaving the burden of life so many footsteps behind me. I went to my cabin, locked the door, and took forty-four sleeping pills.

But when I awakened I was in the dispensary, and alive.

I felt the throb of engines as I slowly stood up and somehow made it to the port.

Blurred Mars hung like a swollen belly above me, until it dissolved, brimmed over, and streamed down my face.

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#### THE MEN WHO MURDERED MOHAMMED—(Continued from page 75.)

"When a man changes the past he only affects his own past . . . no one else's. The past is like memory. When you erase a man's memory, you done' wipe out anybody else. You and I have erased our past. The individual worlds of the others go on, but we have ceased to exist." He paused significantly.

"What d'you mean . . . 'ceased to exist'?"

"With each act of destruction we dissolved a little. Now we're all gone. We've committed chronicide. We're ghosts. I hope Mrs. Hassel will be very happy with Mr. Murphy. . . . Now let's go over to the Academie. Ampere is telling a great story about Ludwig Boltzmann."

## TIMEQUAKE—(Continued from page 81.)

There are those who think that it is better for our moral fiber to have our noses rubbed in unpleasant truths. There are others who subscribe to the ancient cliché that what we don't know won't hurt us. The latter will agree that the timequake was a blessing to all three of them—Raff, Eve, and Terry. Raff at least learned to keep secrets where they couldn't leak out, and that it is easier as well as kinder to keep a deceived husband ignorant and contented than to try to get rid of him by the road of ignominy and disgrace. Eve was saved from open scandal. As for Terry, who is to say that it is not better to live out one's years as an innocent and happy cuckold than bring one's life down in ruins by the murder from which only the timequake rescued him?



## BEWITCHED—(Continued from page 33.)

white-haired woman materialized at the altar, took Julie's hands as if to congratulate her and mumbled a few words.

George was not conscious of the departure of the strange woman. Too many other things were happening. First he felt a stabbing pain in his left ear and then he watched, stupefied, as Julie cleared the altar rail in one graceful bound, slapped Diane's face and then left the church, running swiftly and lightly over the tops of the pews.

After searching the town unavailingly for his missing bride, George made his way to the honeymoon cottage late that night. As he entered the yard he looked up and saw Julie, attired in a diaphanous nightgown, sitting on the peak of the roof.

"Hi, Georgie," she called gaily. "Come on up and take a gander at the moon. I wouldn't be surprised but what it'll give you all sorts of ideas . . ."

George, attired in a dressing gown, sat on the bed and watched as the first rays of a dawning sun fell on the adorable features of his sleeping bride. There was a contented smile on her lips and from them issued an ever so soft purring sound.

"At least," George told himself, "her ears definitely are not pointed." Then he yawned and lay down beside Julie.

"I suppose," he mused, "that there is a little cat in the best of women and they'll all snatch fishbones from life in one way or another, but they'll make up for biting and scratching when they're displeased, by purring when they're happy and a man'd be a fool to want it otherwise—"

Then he remembered the strange, elderly woman who had appeared in the church and he addressed his last waking thought to her.

"But, please, H. K. Brock," he murmured, "don't overdo it."



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